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# FAITH AND LIFE

## SERMONS

BY

GEORGE TYBOUT PURVES, D.D., LL.D.

LATE PASTOR OF THE FIFTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NEW YORK  
SOMETIME PROFESSOR IN PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

By BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, D.D., LL.D.

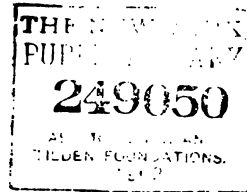
PROFESSOR IN PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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TO  
ALL WHO LOVE THE GOSPEL  
AND ESPECIALLY TO  
THOSE WHO HAVE ENJOYED THE PRIVILEGE OF  
HEARING IT FROM THE LIPS OF  
THE GREAT PREACHER  
SOME OF WHOSE SERMONS ARE HERE PRINTED  
THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED  
BY THOSE TO WHOM HAS BEEN ENTRUSTED ITS PREPARATION  
FOR THE PRESS  
ELIJAH RICHARDSON CRAVEN JOHN DE WITT  
BENJAMIN BRECKINRIDGE WARFIELD  
WILLIAM PARK ARMSTRONG JR



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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THE sermons printed in this volume have been taken, practically at random, from the hundreds of manuscript sermons left by Dr. Purves. They are thought to represent fairly his ordinary preaching; or, as it would be better to say, his ordinary preparation for preaching. For Dr. Purves did not prepare these manuscripts to be read or verbally recited in the pulpit. His actual preaching was eminently free, resting on careful preparation, but depending much also on the mental action of the moment. Part of his preparation consisted, however, in writing out the sermon which he purposed to deliver. This writing was very rapidly done; though it resulted in putting a complete sermon on the paper, it can scarcely be said to have put it there completely. The manuscripts are rough in the extreme, crowded with abbreviations, and bear obvious marks of having been written merely to fix the preacher's thoughts. The sermons drawn from them cannot pretend to be such sermons as Dr. Purves preached. Much less can they be supposed to be such sermons as he would have been content permanently to fix in print. They represent rather Dr. Purves' sermons as they first presented



themselves to his mind,—the first impressions, which he afterwards adjusted, filled out, and enriched for their oral presentation. He would have felt it necessary very thoroughly to revise, or rather wholly to rewrite them, before they were committed to type.

A certain injustice is therefore inevitably done Dr. Purves' memory as a preacher by printing these extemporaneous first-drafts of his sermons. Neither in literary form, nor in homiletical structure, nor even, perhaps, in religious teaching (if at least our mind is set on proportion and precision of statement), can they be held to represent fairly his remarkably clear, strong, and rich preaching. Those who have been charged with the duty of deciding whether to print or not to print, have, in these circumstances, naturally felt much hesitation. But Dr. Purves is gone from us ; the sermons as he preached them, or as he would have printed them, are beyond our reach. It seems a pity, however, that his voice should be wholly stilled. Even in the extemporaneous form in which they appear in the manuscripts, these sermons seem to us remarkable sermons, and if not fully representative of Dr. Purves' powers, nevertheless not unworthy of his talents, and quite capable, as vital presentations of the essentials of Christian truth, not only of embalming his memory worthily, but of serving further that Gospel to which he enthusiastically gave his life, and for the advancement of which he would have been more than willing

to sacrifice much. We give this small selection of them to the world with the conviction that there is a blessing in them, which we should be sorry to withhold from the wider circles which have not enjoyed the privilege of hearing the living preacher's voice.

It seems fitting to prefix some account of the life and work out of which these sermons came.

George Tybout Purves was born in Philadelphia on the 27th of September, 1852. As every Scotchman would know from the name itself, the family was of Berwickshire origin; and Berwick men bearing it have won a place for it both in the secular and in the religious history of Scotland. It was thence that about the middle of the eighteenth century that John Purves came, who, emigrating to America, and establishing himself as a merchant, first at Bridgeton, N. J., and then at Philadelphia, became the ancestor of Dr. Purves. He was a man of convictions, having also the courage of his convictions, for which—being unfortunately a "Tory"—he was called upon to suffer. In West Jersey he found a wife for himself in a Huguenot maiden, bearing the great name of Anne Marot. Their son, Alexander, married, in Margaret Colesberry, a descendant of Swen Colesberg, schoolmaster in the Swedish colony at Wilmington. Thus, Dr. Purves' father, William Purves, the issue of this marriage, was typically American in the complicated mixture of good strains of blood in his

veins. His mother, Anna Kennedy, was of pure North Irish descent, from County Antrim. But her Presbyterianism was no more deeply inbred than that of her husband. John Purves had identified himself from the first with the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, of which he was a trustee. His son, Alexander, succeeded him in that office, and also subsequently served the church in the higher duties of the eldership; and his son, William, after him adorned the latter responsible office through many years. Sprung from this Godly stock, Dr. Purves was born into an ideal Christian household, which "abounded," as one who, as its pastor, knew it well, describes it, "with the sweetest Christian amenities and sanctities."

It was one of the felicities of his life that he was not compelled to leave the goodly and Godly fellowship of this home to obtain his education. His primary schooling was received in the "classical institute" of a notable schoolmaster, the Rev. Dr. John Wylie Faires, "the last in the long succession of Scotch-Irish schoolmasters to whom Philadelphia and the commonwealth owe so much." He is described by one of his teachers of this period as small and quiet, little aggressive in his work, and perhaps not revealing his full ability as it was afterward called forth by circumstances, fond withal of outdoor sports, especially of cricket, in which he was proficient. "I remember well," this teacher adds, "his striking face, his modest

demeanor, his correct recitations, his eagerness to learn." At the age of sixteen he entered the University of Pennsylvania, whence he was graduated in 1872. His career in the university was a distinguished one. He seems to have won nearly all the prizes in oratory offered; he was also a prize-man in philosophy, and, in his freshman year, in Greek, though after that the classical prizes went to others. When his university course was over, he devoted an additional year to the diligent study of languages and general literature. Dr. Herrick Johnson, his pastor at this time, describes him as already "giving sign and token of all the characteristics that marked his subsequent career: ready, nimble, versatile, scholarly, genial, and gentle,—a winsome fellow."

He had made a public profession of his faith just after completing his fourteenth year (October 5, 1866); and soon after graduating from the university, he reached the conviction (autumn of 1872) that he should give himself to the work of the ministry. In the autumn of 1873, therefore, he entered the Theological Seminary at Princeton, and thus came into relations with an institution with which, as student, director, professor, and then director again, he retained a close connection for the rest of his life. It is safe to say that no more faithful pupil ever sat upon the hard benches of the "Old Seminary" class-rooms. He neglected nothing. He accomplished with distinction every task that was set him. His easy mastery of the

subjects embraced in the curriculum was, however, only one of the ways in which he exhibited a vigor and a richness of mental life that won from the first the respect of his preceptors and the admiration of his comrades. He was by common consent pronounced the best preacher in his class ; and none will contest his claim to have been the best of good companions. The somewhat meagre opportunities for extra-curriculum work then afforded by the seminary, he took, of course, full advantage of. These included rather extended studies in Shemitic Philology, under the instruction of Dr. J. F. McCurdy, then John C. Green Instructor in Hebrew. But they particularly embraced continuous and loving study of the New Testament, under the instruction of Dr. C. W. Hodge. He was graduated from the seminary in 1876, but remained in connection with it an additional year, engaged in advanced work in Biblical Literature and Biblical Theology under the direction of Drs. Caspar Wistar Hodge and William Henry Green.

He profited, of course, from all the instruction he received in the seminary, as only a mind like his, at once docile and independent, receptive and fertile, could profit. But the formative influence that was exerted on him came from Dr. Caspar Wistar Hodge. What he felt he owed to the inspiring personality and the impressive teaching of this wide-minded scholar, and the affectionate gratitude with which he bore him in

life-long memory, he himself has told us, only last spring, in the eulogy he pronounced, at the unveiling of a tablet erected to the memory of his revered instructor, in the chapel of Princeton Seminary. Probably no other of his teachers exercised so moulding an influence upon him ; although he always acknowledged a debt also to the Rev. Dr. Charles Porterfield Krauth, who had imbued his youthful mind with his philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. He gradually drifted away from Dr. Krauth's characteristic tenets, however, whereas Dr. Hodge's method and spirit became ever more and more his own.

In the meantime Mr. Purves had been licensed by the Presbytery of Philadelphia to preach the Gospel (May 2, 1876), and immediately on completing his graduate studies in the seminary, he was ordained by the Presbytery of Chester (April 27, 1877), and installed pastor of the little church at Wayne. Even in that somewhat retired parish he quickly drew attention, and accordingly, when the Broadway Avenue Church in Baltimore was established (1880), it was he who was called to put the new enterprise on its feet. This he thoroughly did, growing meanwhile himself steadily in pulpit power. After six years of labor in that fruitful field he was fixed upon by the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh—whose pastor, the Rev. Sylvester F. Scovel, had been taken from it, in 1883, to become President of Wooster University—as the

man it needed to carry forward its high traditions and compact its energies. In this pastorate, as one of the closest and most sympathetic observers of his work has put it, he achieved "one of the triumphs of the modern ministry." He "showed that even in a 'down-town' church scholarship can do more than sensationalism, and that unfeigned devotion to the simple Gospel is the only true basis for genuine pulpit power. He gathered into his audience all classes and conditions, gentle and simple, wise and unwise, who sat at his feet and heard his words with delight, and were moved to holy living by the vital power of the Word as he preached it."

"Meanwhile," continues the same writer, "he was busy in his study, ever the secret spring that fed his pulpit." During all these years of successful pulpit work he had, in fact, never intermitted his enthusiastic study of the New Testament and related branches of theological investigation. A specimen of his scholarly attainments was now given to the world in his course of "Stone Lectures," delivered at Princeton Seminary in the autumn of 1888, and shortly afterward published in a goodly volume. Other publications followed in the Reviews, and it soon became quite clear that a light of learning had been lifted up whose shining could not be hid. The seminaries began to turn longing eyes toward him. He was sought by more than one of them for more than one

chair of instruction. Princeton Seminary endeavored in vain to secure him for its chair of Church History. During a vacancy in the chair of Dogmatic Theology at the Western Seminary at Allegheny, he actually taught that branch of theology throughout a whole session to delighted classes; and both that seminary and McCormick Seminary would fain have secured him for that chair. But his heart was fixed in its devotion to the critical study of the New Testament. And at length, in 1892, on the death of his beloved instructor in this department, he was prevailed upon to take up the work that had fallen from Dr. Hodge's hands. Thus he became Professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis in Princeton Seminary.

To the work of this chair he brought not only eminent general abilities and a remarkable and special aptitude, but a trained exegetical tact and a large store of accumulated knowledge. He brought also an unbounded energy and zeal, and a depth of religious sentiment which rendered every word of the New Testament precious to him, and made its exposition and enforcement his greatest delight. It is using wholly inadequate language to speak of his eight years of instruction in this chair as successful. His instruction was enthusiastically given and enthusiastically received. He impressed his pupils profoundly. For many years to come the Church will be richer in men who know and love the New Testament for these years



of his work in the seminary. In these pupils he will live anew as they expound the Scriptures in the spirit which they have learned from him.

His class-room work, however, did not suffice him. His burning zeal in the communication of his treasures of divine knowledge led him ever to seek and to find other channels of expression. He wrote much for the religious press; he even became for a time a regular contributor to one of our church papers. He was in great demand as a public lecturer, and made frequent and long journeys to deliver either a single address or a course of lectures. Even this was not enough. He was soon found preaching regularly every Sabbath evening in one of the Princeton churches, with an especial view to the needs of the unevangelized classes, and particularly of the young men gathered so numerous in this university town. Just as while he was in the pastorate he was besieged by the seminaries, seeking to obtain his gifts and learning for their chairs of instruction; so, now, when he was at last in the seminary, he was besieged by the churches, seeking to obtain his demonstrated ability and tried skill for their pulpits. Numerous calls came to him from the outstanding churches of the land; back to Pittsburgh, to Baltimore, to Philadelphia, to New York. Every one of them tempted him. He loved to preach and was conscious of the power that went out from him. But he contented himself for the time with becoming

· stated-supply to the First Presbyterian Church of Princeton (1897), though this soon ripened into his settlement as regular pastor of that church (1899).

He put his shoulders under his double burden with an enthusiasm that knew no measure. An assistant was given him in the church; an assistant was given him in the seminary. But he appeared to be concerned not so much to shift some of his work to them, as to invent enough additional work in the congregation and seminary to keep them also busy. He himself responded to the demands made on him, and expanded to ever greater power. It was during his Princeton pastorate, for example, that he developed his full gifts as a pastor. Perhaps at the outset of his career it was the intellectual side of his work that was most prominent; it was especially in the pulpit that he made full proof of his ministry. As his ministry ripened to its close, however, he had become a model pastor, absolutely tireless, and remarkably effective in his infinitely sympathetic personal intercourse with his people. These superabounding labors proved, of course, too much for his strength, sapped, as it now proved to be, by the inroads of a fatal disease. So, in the spring of 1900, he laid down his work in Princeton, and became pastor of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York, the fourth in that series of remarkable pastors by which the history of that church during the last half century has

been distinguished—James W. Alexander, Nathan L. Rice, John Hall, and George T. Purves. This was, in a sense, the fitting culmination of his life. But less than eighteen months were granted him for the cultivation of this new field before he “fell on sleep,” having literally worn himself out in a service of love.

It is doubtless idle to ask whether Dr. Purves was more the preacher or more the scholar. The greater portion of his active life was passed in the pulpit, and it will not be strange if he is longer remembered as one of the most impressive preachers of his day. In truth, however, the two things cannot be separated in his case. He was never more the profoundly instructed scholar than when he stood in the pulpit: he was never more the preacher of righteousness than when he sat in the class-room. He certainly was not a scholastic preacher; and he certainly was not what is called a “homiletical” teacher. He was too ripe a scholar to take the atmosphere of the study into the pulpit with him; he was too skilled in the art of religious impression to carry the pulpit tone into the class-room. But, on the other hand, the whole man, with all his gifts and graces, was present wherever he went; and as he was one of the most reverential of teachers, so was he habitually one of the most theological of preachers.

It was not merely that he had thought himself through theologically, and held firmly to a devel-

oped theological system which underlay and sustained and gave body to all his preaching. This was eminently true of him; and it went far to account for the consistency, strength, and edifying effect of his pulpit ministrations. But he did not merely preach out of his theology; he preached his theology. He constantly took a theological topic for his subject, and developed it with notable precision and fullness. As he preached his theology, so also he preached his "criticism." The boldness with which he introduced into his sermons the results, and, on the positive side, even the processes of his critical studies, was equalled only by the skill with which he bent it all to serve a religious end. The staple of his preaching may be, perhaps, best described as Biblico-theological. His colleague, Dr. John DeWitt, has admirably expressed it by calling his sermons "didactic orations of which the substance was yielded by studies in Biblical theology." But so skillful was he in truly popular exposition, so free was he from all parade of learning, so vitalized was all he said with experimental religion, so earnestly and simply were the truths he presented pressed home to the heart and conscience, that only the most reflecting of his hearers quite realized that they were being as carefully "indoctrinated" as they were being powerfully aroused to religious emotion and action.

The most striking quality of his delivery was its vigor,—its nervous expenditure. He preached all

over. He threw a tremendous energy of bodily action into what he said, gesturing not with forethought and calculated effect, but as if the force of his conviction and his earnestness of purpose must find exit in something more than words. His spoken style was correct, clear, and forcible. He was no phrase-maker; he did not deal in antitheses, assonances, colloquialisms; he used illustrations sparingly. He had no broken-sentences; his periods were rounded, balanced, and pellucidly clear; he never framed an unintelligible, weak, or unvitalized sentence. He knew what he wished to say, and he knew how to say it so that it went straight from his lips to the intellects, hearts, and consciences of his hearers. His sermons were always systematically and compactly organized and made a unitary impression. His aim in preaching was obviously not to delight but to instruct, not to give pleasure but guidance; and he had his reward. He was not a revivalist—he was rather a master-builder. His churches grew steadily and solidly under his hands, and became compacted into thoroughly vitalized organisms. To this result no doubt the faithfulness of his pastoral care contributed; but much must be attributed also to the faithfulness and power of his preaching.

The Rev. Dr. George E. Horr, of Boston, happened to hear Dr. Purves at a communion service in the Fifth Avenue Church, New York, just as he was about to assume that pastorate; and the visitor wrote out the

impression he carried away with him and printed it in his paper, *The Watchman* (March 1, 1900). It will perhaps give us a more vivid picture of Dr. Purves in the pulpit than we can easily obtain elsewhere. "Dr. Purves," he writes, "is a stocky man, a little below the medium height, with a clear, persuasive, penetrating voice. The peculiar quality of his preaching is its combination of modernness and conservative orthodoxy. His topic was 'The Precious Blood of Christ.' His language was clear, direct, and sinewy; his analysis of his proposition singularly convincing and effective, and the discourse moved strongly, like an army, from point to point, leaving the impression that the blood of the Redeemer was infinitely worthful. But the assumptions of the discourse were as weighty as its argument. Dr. Purves did not apologize for the Bible nor seek to show that its statements are true. He assumed their truth, and some of the most conclusive and effective passages in the sermon were those in which he appealed to the Word of God in confirmation of his statements. He quotes the Scriptures with accuracy and pertinence, though he seems to discard entirely the help of notes."

Cut off as he was in the midst of his days, Dr. Purves has left behind him no such literary product as will convey to posterity an adequate measure of his powers. He served his own generation. Outside of the pulpit and the class-room, it was in numerous

addresses and equally numerous "flying leaves" of newspaper articles that he expended his strength. It is easy to value these too lightly. We are, perhaps, prone to overestimate the relative importance of books: *Litera scripta manet*. But the "winged word" of speech moves the world; and it is better, after all, to form characters than to compile volumes. Dr. Purves seems to have thought so; and he gave himself freely, or rather prodigally, to the oral communication of his thought. The subjects on which he spoke, the audiences which he addressed, were of the most varied kinds. Few of these addresses have found their way into print. But each has had its own effect on human lives.

He published but two books. One of these has already been mentioned—his admirable "Stone Lectures," on *The Testimony of Justin Martyr to Early Christianity*, published in 1889. By its side he placed, in the closing days of his professorship at Princeton, his equally admirable hand-book on *The Apostolic Age* (1900). Both books are thoroughly characteristic of Dr. Purves: careful, painstaking, absolutely honest pieces of work, presented in an unambitious, workmanlike style. In reviewing the former book, Lüdemann, though rejecting Dr. Purves' whole point of view, yet is constrained to confess that his work exhibits "thorough knowledge," and proceeds by means of "an exact presentation of the data—suppress-

ing nothing, concealing nothing." This is worth adverting to, as it reveals a fundamental trait of Dr. Purves' mind. His was above everything else a fair mind, an honest mind. He might sometimes appear too cautious in reaching and announcing conclusions; never too little so.

In a notable address, which he delivered at the Commencement Exercises of Emporia College in 1894, on *The Value of the Highest Culture*, he let drop a phrase which fairly enunciates the note of all his work. "Such culture," he says, "induces caution and modesty in reaching conclusions." There speaks Dr. Purves' scientific conscience, and there we have in a few words the primary trait of his scientific life. He sedulously sought to have all the facts before him before forming an opinion. Perhaps he sometimes found it difficult to recognize the truth until he could see it whole. But he spared no pains in seeking to see it whole. And when he did come to see it, he clung to it with the strength of conviction naturally induced by the consciousness that he had attained it by solid processes of investigation and thought.

It is worth while to observe that both of Dr. Purves' published works are historical studies, and historical studies based on minute investigation and presented with masterly command of the material. The same historical interest is apparent also in his minor publications. Nevertheless, this was not his primary in-



terest. His engagement with the historical aspects of New Testament problems was the effect partly of his unquenchable zeal for the exploration of every side of New Testament study, but chiefly of the exigencies of the situation. His historical investigations were largely incidental to apologetical ends. The apologetical motive is indeed explicitly put forward in nearly all of his historical studies. Nevertheless, not even in it can we find the real spring of his zeal. If he was interested in history for its apologetical value, he was interested in apologetics not for its own sake, but for the sake of the precious truth which it guarded. His primary interest in the New Testament was, in a word, doctrinal; and he was most in his element when he was investigating its treasures of truth.

He has unfortunately left us very few Biblico-theological discursions; but what he has left us are very sane and very valuable. Those who knew him well found an intense interest in watching the slow but steady and solid growth in his mind of a complete doctrinal system, consciously drawn by him from the New Testament, and built up step by step only as in the course of time he was enabled to investigate thoroughly its entire reach of teaching. To those who knew him well, the fact that the system to which he thus attained was that which is commonly known under the name of Federalistic Calvinism, although he had originally no predilection for this mode of con-

ceiving evangelical truth, but was, on the contrary, somewhat prejudiced against it, afforded notable renewed evidence of the real rooting of this system in the teaching of the New Testament.

The whole mass of Dr. Purves' published scientific work is not large. By the side of his two books there are only five or six extended Review articles to be placed. These, in the order of time of publication, bear the following titles: "The Influence of Paganism on Post-Apostolic Christianity" (*Presbyterian Review*, 1888); "Simon Peter in the School of Christ" (*Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 1891); "St. Paul and Inspiration" (*Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 1893); "The Incarnation Biblically Considered" (in *Christ and the Church*, Revell, 1894); "The Formation of the New Testament" (*Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 1895); "The Witness of Apostolic Literature to Apostolic History" (*Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, 1898); "The Unity of Second Corinthians" (*The Union Seminary Magazine*, 1900). Quite a series of articles were contributed by him also to two recent *Dictionaries of the Bible*,—that edited by Dr. James Hastings and published by T. & T. Clark, and that edited by Dr. John D. Davis and published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication. At the time of his death he was under appointment for two courses of lectures, one to be delivered at Harvard University and one at Princeton Seminary; and he had it in mind

to work up some of his accumulations of scientific material into these. He had also long cherished a design to prepare and publish a treatise on the Apostle Peter, of a type somewhat like Conybeare and Howson's well-known work on Paul. We are the poorer that these projected works were never published.

No account of Dr. Purves' life would be complete which neglected to note his faithfulness in the discharge of the duties that came to him as a presbyter in an organized Church. He was as good a presbyter as he was a pastor, diligent in all the work of the presbytery. He was four times delegated to represent his presbytery in the General Assembly (1884, 1889, 1896, 1901). Those were stirring years in ecclesiastical annals, in which it was no sinecure to serve the Church as a bishop in council. It must suffice here to say that Dr. Purves bore his full part in the labors and the debates of the body, and no voice was more potent in its councils. Special prominence was given him at the Assembly of 1901 by his nomination for the moderatorship; and the affection and esteem in which he was held by the house was exhibited not only by the large vote cast for him in this contest, but also by the reception given him whenever he rose in his place to address the house.

He was one of the representatives of his Church at the Seventh Council of the "Alliance of the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian Sys-

tem," sitting at Washington in 1899. From 1888 to 1892 he was a member of the Board of Missions for Freedmen, and from 1900 to his death, of the Board of Home Missions. He was appointed by the Assembly of 1901 a member of a special *ad interim* committee charged with the duty of stimulating the churches in evangelistic work, with the considering of such work and its conduct in relation to the churches: and into the labors of this committee he was throwing himself with great spirit when death overtook him. It would not be possible to record here, however, all the appointments with which he was entrusted. Let it be enough to say that it was the delight of the Church to honor him with positions of trust and his delight to respond by a most distinguished service to the calls so made upon him.

Dr. Purves' private life was one of exceptional beauty. There was something in his address that was peculiarly charming: a manifest sincerity, willing self-effacement, and unmistakable sympathy. This gave a certain personal quality to all his intercourse which begot in those with whom he came in contact a response in kind. He made many and close friends. The simple annals of a diligent scholar and tireless pastor were his, during all the faithfully improved years in which he grew steadily, like a cedar, straight upward, in perfect quiet, and with no consciousness of the wide shadow he was casting about him. He was

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*INTRODUCTORY NOTE*

just completing his forty-ninth year when he died, in New York, on the 24th of September, 1901, deprived, as we cannot but sadly say to ourselves, of the residue of his days. They were forty-nine strenuous years he had lived. It would be cruel for us to begrudge him at last his well-earned rest.

BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD.

PRINCETON, May 1, 1902.

# FAITH AND LIFE

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## I

### THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE WORLD WITH CHRIST

“He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.”—ISAIAH liii. 2.

THUS Isaiah described beforehand the disappointment which the world would feel with the Messiah. There should be no doubt that the prophet did refer to the Messiah. It is quite probable, indeed, that his description was suggested by the shame and humiliation of Israel's captivity, which also he foresaw; and elsewhere the “Servant of Jehovah” often denotes the people of Israel themselves. But in this chapter the figure of Israel resolves itself into its ideal, and that was realized only in its Messianic Head. Of Him is affirmed a work of expiation which on Biblical principles cannot be attributed to any race or any other individual. While, therefore, the woes of the Babylonian captivity, with its utter defacement of the beauty and glory of Israel, may have given occasion to the vision which Isaiah received of the unutterable lowliness of the Christ, there should be no question that to the Christ his sight was directed in this passage, and to

Him his words referred. In strange contrast with the prophecies of glory, and with the inspired dreams of royal majesty and conquering power, there now appeared the spectacle of One despised and rejected of men; of One who would not appeal to the admiration of mankind; of One whom the world would not rank among her great and noble; of One who would bear the derision of mankind and the very curse of God.

And as this was plainly the prophet's thought, so is it well known that his words served, when the Christ did appear, to explain to His disciples the mystery of their Master's lowliness and shame. When the time came for a Nazarene carpenter and crucified Galilean to be proclaimed to Israel and the world as God's Messiah, the Spirit who had inspired Isaiah used his language both to establish the faith of the disciples and to lead them into the fullness of the truth. Isaiah furnished one of the principal keys by which apostolic thought opened the door of truth and obtained its own precious message to mankind. It was by the term "Servant of Jehovah" that Jesus was proclaimed as Messiah by Peter after Pentecost (Acts iii. 13, R.V.) When Matthew relates the healing miracles of Jesus, he points out that Isaiah had already said of Him, "Himself bore our iniquities and carried our sicknesses" (ix. 17). When John describes the obstinacy of Jewish unbelief, he reminds us that Isaiah had asked, "Who hath believed our report

and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed" (xii. 38)? The same is done by Paul in the Epistle to the Romans (x. 16). Jesus himself had pointed His disciples to this prophecy when, after the Transfiguration, He reminded them that "it is written of the Son of Man that He must suffer many things and be set at naught" (Mark ix. 12). Peter, in his First Epistle (ii. 23, 24), weaves Isaiah's words with his own when describing the silent and patient Sufferer, "who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree; by whose stripes we were healed." The use of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is even more explicit and frequent in the early Christian literature of the post-apostolic age. We evidently have in it a divinely provided interpretation by which apostolic as well as uninspired thought was enabled to explain the fact of the Lord's humiliation, and by which the disciples were strengthened against all doubt as they pointed the world to such an improbable Messiah, to such an uncrowned King.

Both the prophet's words and the apostolic use of them thus bring before us the fact of the disappointment which the world naturally feels with Jesus. Judged by the standards of common glory and greatness, He is "without form and comeliness." This is the way in which the Bible presents Him. And yet I am afraid that this truth is often obscured at the



present time. Around the name of Jesus a new glory has gathered. The breaking of the homely vase has filled the world with the fragrance of the heavenly ointment that was within. Under His own influence, men have come to look with more appreciation at His lowliness and to glorify His sufferings. But this is too often done by applying to Him the world's standard of greatness, and by attempting to show that, even when thus judged, He is not "without form and comeliness." In this way the measurement is changed; and there often follows an attempt to vindicate His right to man's allegiance because He is the first among many masters. This is an example of the wave of naturalism which is sweeping over Christian thought, and which decorates with its purple cloak the suffering Christ Himself.

It is not without reason, therefore, that we emphasize the disappointment which the natural mind must ever feel with the Christ of the Bible. Let me call your attention to the fact itself, and then to its significance.

First, then, the fact. It appears most obviously in the disappointment of the natural mind with the outward events of Christ's career on earth. So was it at the beginning, even to the point of ridicule. He did not appear with the common insignia of royalty. He was known, not even as a Bethlehemite, but as a Nazarene. His career was connected with no attempt at political uprising, nor did He appeal to the common

ambitions of His people. He was a simple preacher of peace and righteousness. He was not a man of the aristocracy, either social or intellectual. He was a peasant and the friend of publicans. His life was spent among the inglorious poor. At last He was overwhelmed by His enemies and crucified, as a malefactor, between two robbers. It was a difficult story to make attractive to the natural mind. To the Jew, it was a stumbling-block, and to the Greek, foolishness. The wonder is that, with so little to appeal to man's ordinary ideals of greatness and beauty, the messengers of the Crucified should have obtained any audience at all.


But it may be said that the world has now learned its mistake, and has come to appreciate the real beauty of the story of Jesus. Does not even scepticism pay tribute to Him, and acknowledge that His poverty and shame are more honorable than wealth and crowns? In this matter it is necessary for us carefully to discriminate.

It is true that the power of Jesus in human history has thrown a glamour over the unlovely events of His career; so that they have become interesting to many who would not naturally take any interest in them whatever. We all go back to the beginnings of a great man's life, and invest them, however humble, with historical sacredness. The log-cabin in which a President was born interests us more than if it were a stately mansion, just because of its contrast with what

might have been expected. But this is only historical interest. It does not mean in the least that the cabin is thought beautiful or that we should like to live in such a dwelling.

Then, too, art has made the life of Jesus the theme of its mighty skill. It has invested with the halo of its fine imagination the homely manger and the peasant mother, the simple teacher and the Galilæan fisherman, the weeping figure in Gethsemane and the bleeding figure on the cross. This has had the effect of making these scenes familiar and beloved. The world glories in the triumphs of its art. Whatever art has touched is made an object of veneration. Its treatment of the life of Christ has idealized the Christ. Even realistic art cannot help glorifying such a subject. In consequence of this, the story of Jesus has become one of the world's treasures with which the maddest unbelief would not be willing to part.

And then modern sentiment, aside from art and the reflex influence of Christianity on the life of the world, has made the life of Jesus seem more beautiful than it did in ancient times. We do not now care much for the trappings of royalty. Labor has become honorable. The common people have asserted their rights. The modern world is democratic. Self-sacrifice itself is thought more beautiful than conquest. Men's ideals have partly changed under the influence of Christianity. The modern world is rather glad to be told that its




God was a carpenter. It is more conscious of its own wrongs than of its duties, and therefore is not averse to knowing that the Master was as unjustly treated as it feels itself to be.

Thus from various causes the offensiveness of Christ's career has apparently been removed, and the temptation is strong to suppose that the appearance is real. There is no more ridicule heaped upon Him. His humiliation would rather seem to be His greatest glory. But in fact this rehabilitation of Jesus is quite deceptive.

It is still true that to the natural mind the facts themselves are hard and unlovely. It was a peasant's life, after all. It was wholly without ornament or ambitious aspiration or martial prowess. It was a self-repressing life. It is a story of hunger, pain, persecution, and death; and these become beautiful to the world only when they are invested with romantic associations. Their beauty lies in what we believe to have been before and after and behind them. But as the bare facts were first proclaimed to an unprepared world, they excited contempt; and if you tell them to-day to unprepared heathenism, they will be likely to meet with the same reception.

Nor do they correspond with the actual ideals of the natural mind, even when the latter has been affected by Christianity. Who would be so bold as to affirm that men really admire meekness, self-crucifixion, gentleness, and patience? Or if a measure of admiration for



these virtues be forced from some by the power of Christian education, who would maintain that they are the real ideals of the modern any more than of the ancient world? The common life of mankind unhappily would belie such an assertion. The world in its heart sees no beauty in them, and turns with joy from the gloomy contemplation of such things to the glittering prizes which its self-love and ambition see.

And to crown it all, when the lowly, suffering Christ is presented as the only Saviour; when the world is summoned to cast away all its pride and trust for salvation to His merits alone; the old offensiveness returns in all its power. This is no more a welcome message now than it was in the days of Paul. To the natural mind, it is foolishness. Salvation must be gained, if at all, by ourselves. Reason is the true guide and the human will the saving power. We may invest the Nazarene's life with all the glamour which art sentiment and, historical association can give; we may appeal with all eloquence to Him as the true ideal of character over against the false; but when we go farther and present the Nazarene as the only one who is able to save, His life as our righteousness, His death as our sacrifice, then the natural mind turns away, as of old, with open or concealed denial.

If, then, we turn from the outward events of Christ's career to consider Him as a teacher, how does He fare in the estimate of the natural mind? In this aspect

He comes into comparison with the other famous instructors of humanity. When judged as they are, is He likely to be rated as high as they? Of course, it is admitted on all sides that He was a great teacher. All are forced to concede this. But the reverence of the natural mind for Him even as a teacher is more a concession to tradition than a real veneration. When we bring Him into comparison with others, and if we apply to Him the tests by which the admission of their greatness is secured, the result, from the world's point of view, is again disappointing.

For one thing, Jesus was not an author. He made no contribution to the world's literature. His disciples did under His influence, but He himself did not. In this indeed He was like Socrates; but the fact is more significant than may at first appear. It indicates that He did not aspire after intellectual renown. He did not aim at winning the world by intellectual methods. He did not value beauty of literary form. He was no poet like David. He left no written code of laws like Moses. He composed no history. Unlike even the prophets and apostles, He did not commit His instructions to paper in order to secure their perpetuation or to move mankind by the genius of His thought. By failing to do this, He deliberately deprived himself of one of the chief instruments by which other teachers have won a place among the leaders of mankind.

Still further, His method of teaching was not philosophical. The great thinkers of the world have usually won fame more by the processes of their thought than by its results. It is the process of thought which makes the impression of intellectual power. Herein lay the power of Socrates, though he left no literary remains. The great philosophers have been famous mainly for their methods of investigation and instruction. Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, are far more influential because of the processes of philosophic thought for which they respectively stand, than for the particular results of thought to which they attained. It is the process which makes their reputation as philosophers: and before the intellect in operation the world always has been ready to bow.

But Christ's teaching is quite devoid of philosophical method. It is rather the simple affirmation of truth by one who claimed to be in authority. Such is the express testimony of those who heard Him, and it is confirmed by the Gospel reports. He had none of the subtle exegesis of the rabbis, none of the nobler dialectics of the Greeks. He does not impress us at all as a great thinker; because He gives no evidence of either effort or process of thought. He does not belong to the class of intellectual giants, because He did not philosophize, but simply bore His witness. If it be said that this is because He was an Oriental, we reply that Orientals have not been the intellectual leaders

## DISAPPOINTMENT OF WORLD WITH CHRIST II

of the world. But He did not stand comparison, from their own point of view, with the rabbis of His own nation. It is quite impossible to give Him the same honor which belongs to the other teachers of the world.

It is still more important to observe in this connection that Jesus did not deal, as a teacher, with those subjects which have commonly been thought to form the natural sphere of intellectual genius. He did not discuss the nature of the world, or of the soul, or of absolute being. He did not lead men into the laboratory of nature. He did not deal with metaphysics. He did not solve the mystery of evil. He gave utterance to no flights of imagination. He did not even present religious truth in a systematized form. On all these subjects His person and His teaching throw, for the Christian, infinite light. But He was not what the world calls a philosopher or a poet in respect to the method of His teaching. He belongs to a different class. His type is the prophet; and while in the end the world may acknowledge the prophet's mission, it does not class him so high as the philosopher.

Thus when we apply to Christ the standards by which other men, great in the realm of intellect, have been measured, the world finds Him wanting. He suffers in this respect even by comparison with some of His disciples. The final proof of it is that the world, in fact, does not reckon Him in the list of its intel-



lectual leaders. You do not find His name, except incidentally, in the histories of philosophy or literature. And this judgment of Him is correct. He was not what is commonly called a great thinker; He was incarnate thought. He was not a seeker after truth; He was truth itself. When men seek in Him for the glory of intellectual genius, as this is elsewhere estimated, they simply do not find its marks.

Still again, when the natural mind approaches Jesus as a moral teacher—the sphere in which He is pre-eminent—He is still in many respects not such as the world thinks such a teacher ought to be. For He did not do the things which most other teachers of morality have sought to do, and for doing which praise is accorded to them. For example, He made no effort to set right the crying evils of the society of His day. There were many of these: violent military oppression; the enforced slavery of thousands; the tyranny of the wealthy few over the pauper multitudes. But Jesus did not lift up His voice against slavery, or war, or class oppression. He inveighed indeed against trust in riches, but He did so from the point of view of the individual. He did not deal with political or economic questions. He was not so much of a reformer as John the Baptist was. Why, men ask, did He not explicitly solve for the world the grievances which have lain so heavily upon human life concerning its social condition? Have not these

grievances become only the more deeply felt as the spirit of Christianity has spread? Why, then, did not the author of Christianity deal with them at the first?

Of course, we who are His followers, now know that His method was the wisest. Immediate social reconstruction would have prevented the spread of those ethical principles by which alone such reconstruction has been at all possible. But the fact remains that in the world's estimate Jesus is, even as a moral teacher, a disappointment. Many an earnest reformer has wished that Jesus had not practiced so much reserve on these subjects. Others, more impetuous, have even declaimed against Him in this very sphere. To much of modern humanitarianism does He seem to come far short of what the ideal saviour of society ought to be. When we face the bitter, furious, practical grievances of modern social life with the Sermon on the Mount, the Golden Rule, and the doctrine of Self-sacrifice, how little welcome has the natural mind for these remedies! There is no beauty in them.

Thus, I think, the effort to show the greatness and beauty of Christ by means of those considerations by which greatness and beauty are elsewhere estimated inevitably fails. The fact is one that ought not to be concealed. To the natural mind, under the power of self-love, what beauty is there in poverty, humility, renunciation, suffering, and death? To the natural

intellect, what greatness in a teacher whose only message was about God and holiness, who gave no evidence of profound intellectual methods, and did not deal at all with the problems of science and philosophy? The ardent reformer, if his, too, be the natural mind, grows impatient with this teacher who seems to avoid the social complications of morality. Let me not be misunderstood. With all my soul, I bow in homage before the very qualities in Jesus at which the world takes offence. His life is the true ideal, before the splendor of which the common ideals of the world are as glittering dross to gold. His teaching contains the true philosophy; and unless philosophy accept both His affirmations and His implications, it will ever remain a fruitless search. His ethics, likewise, are the true basis of all social reconstruction as well as of a noble individual life. But, as He stands before us in His historic career on earth, and when He is measured by the standards of greatness and beauty employed by the natural mind, He is still "without form or comeliness." He is a disappointment. Praise of Him may be wrung from men through the influence which He himself has had upon the world, and which has forced its way even into unbelieving minds. But the natural mind, now as of old, can on its own principles give no real recognition of His intrinsic glory. Its forced and feeble praises should not hide the fact of its essential rejection.

Such I take to be the fact. Let us consider its significance.

It has, first, a very important historical significance. For, in view of our discussion, the question must arise, How is the overwhelming power of Jesus over His first disciples to be explained? How did He succeed in originating Christianity? How came it that He won His way so rapidly into the confidence and veneration of so many both in the Jewish and the Gentile world? The origin of Christianity ought to be an enigma to the natural mind. As I have shown, Jesus was utterly devoid of those qualities which are usually thought able to start and to sustain such a movement. His external life was fitted to arouse ridicule and contempt, and did arouse them. He did not move the minds of men by the power of intellectual genius. He initiated no social reform. But these have been the chief motive-powers by which other similar movements have been originated. It will not do to say that mere affection for His person explains this power, for that would need to have been based on deeper reasons if it were to influence any but a very few. Mohammed relied on the power of the sword. Socrates became famous as an intellectual genius. But Jesus was neither soldier nor philosopher. What then was the power of this lowly and crucified Nazarene?

The only sufficient answer is that He gave to His followers supernatural evidence that He had come

from God. This was supplied by His resurrection; and then it was confirmed by their experience of reconciliation with God through faith in Him. Take away the supernatural from the origin of Christianity, and you have an effect without a cause. If it be said that it originated in enthusiasm for Jesus, and that around this crystallized religious and intellectual ideas which gave force to the movement, we ask how are we to account for this original enthusiasm when Jesus, if He be stripped of the supernatural, was without the qualities which on natural principles arouse the zeal of men. To the thoroughgoing evolutionist His power must remain inscrutable. It is like the beginning of life in nature. It is like the origin of mind. In fact, only a supernatural cause will explain the phenomena. So disappointing a Messiah, so improbable a Saviour, so unphilosophical a Teacher, could not have originated the greatest movement in the world's history if the power of God had not been with Him and in Him. Certainly at least did the first disciples themselves realize that it was only the power of God which could secure the faith of men. This is Paul's explicit declaration. He was right. The origin of Christianity was supernatural; or else, on natural principles, it remains an insoluble enigma.

But the fact which we are considering has also a profound religious significance. For another question arises, viz., Why did God thus reveal Himself through

His Messiah in such utter lowliness? It would have been easy for Christ to have eclipsed all others in their own spheres. He might have been born like a king. He might have given us the ultimate philosophy. He might have entered at once on the reconstruction of the world. He might have done these things, that is, so far as His power was concerned. But could He have fulfilled His purpose in these ways? The Bible answers that He could not. And why? Because the radical need is not knowledge. It is redemption. The salvation of the world primarily depends upon the provision of an atonement. The debt of sin must be paid. Eternal justice must first be satisfied. Only then will knowledge profit. Only then can individual holiness be reached. Only then can social reconstruction proceed.

This is the truth which the natural mind does not perceive. Its blindness to this is the cause of its failure to appreciate Jesus. The need of redemption is the fact which alone explains the lowliness of the Christ. So Isaiah declared. After our text he explains, "He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." This is the only adequate explanation. So long as men feel no need of redemption, they will be disappointed with Jesus. So long as they apply to Him earthly standards, He will fail to win their entire allegiance. But when they feel their

guilt, then will they see that their earthly standards are out of place, and that the very absence from Him of earthly glory is the way by which He fulfils a grander purpose and meets their direst need. It is, in short, not possible to understand or to appreciate Jesus Christ until redemption by sacrifice is perceived to be the keynote of His mission.

And therefore I would indicate the practical significance of the fact, which we have considered, especially for preachers of Christianity. If we present to men the Christ of the Bible, we may expect to find the natural mind ever disappointed with Him. And it will not be worth our while to try to remove the prejudice by arraying Him in tawdry robes that do not belong to Him. We shall not secure true allegiance to Him by instituting a comparison between Him and other masters. If we could show that He surpassed all others in their spheres, we should still have failed in our mission. In fact, however, as I have stated, the comparison will be disappointing. Such efforts are but little better than when the soldier cast the purple cloak upon Him and cried, "Hail, King of the Jews!"

Nay, we must present Him as He really is. He must ever be known as the Crucified. Just because He is that, are we sure that He is the Divine. He is not to be measured by others. He is so infinitely noble, that these measurements do not apply to Him. But, whenever by the Spirit of God human souls are

wakened to the reality of guilt and to the bondage of sin, will they see that, as despised and rejected of men, Jesus is what they need. With this all their judgments will change. The false splendor of the world's pomp will fade away. The pride of intellect will abase itself before Him as the highest truth. Even the striving after good will change into a striving after God. The unutterable glory of the Cross will dawn upon them. Christ will no more be one of many masters. He will be the Lamb and the Word of God. O, thou man of sorrows, how much more glorious art Thou than any dream of human greatness! To the guilty conscience, how priceless is Thy blood! To the prodigal seeking the divine Father, how welcome is the knowledge of Thine obedience! Yea, Thou dost draw near to us by Thy very lowliness; Thou dost disclose the true beauty of love by Thy very shame! Thou only, despised and rejected One, Thou only canst save!

My brothers, take this divine and despised Redeemer to the world. Put Him in no pantheon of great men. Glory in His humiliation. Let others appear to surpass Him in the estimate of the world. Do you point out that He is greater than all because He is less than all; worthy of worship because He was deemed unworthy by the world; able to save because He would not save Himself; the One altogether lovely because in the poor world's sight "without form or comeli-



ness." Preach and trust "Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

## II

### THE ALPHA AND OMEGA

“I am Alpha and Omega.”—REVELATION xxii. 13.

THE Lord Jesus Christ was the central figure of the whole vision seen by Saint John in Patmos, even as the coming of Christ is the theme of the whole Apocalypse. That remarkable book begins with the appearance of the glorified Saviour to His beloved disciple. John heard behind him a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying, “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” And he beheld, in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, one like unto the Son of man, but strangely different from the lowly form of Jesus of Nazareth, because invested with the symbols of divine majesty and power.

This appearance gives the key to all the following visions. The messages to the seven churches of Asia were from this Christ; they were delivered with all the authority of a master; and they rebuked and praised with the sovereignty of an absolute king. Then, in the vision of the throne in heaven, the seer beheld in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders,

a Lamb as it had been slain, who came and took the book of the decrees out of the right hand of God, and before whom the heavenly multitude fell down with loud and long worship. So when the first seal of the book was broken, Christ, on a white horse, was seen to ride forth, with a crown given Him, conquering and to conquer. Again, He is represented as the Child of Israel, caught up at birth unto God and to His throne, against whom the dragon and his angels, and the beasts which obey the dragon's will, incessantly make war. Still again He issues forth from heaven on His work of conquest, followed by the armies of the skies, and bearing on His vesture and on His thigh the name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. And finally He proclaims Himself the author of His Apostle's vision: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." For as in the early twilight, when the light and darkness combat with each other, the morning star heralds the coming day, so amid these visions of the conflict between spiritual light and darkness is the figure of Christ. The sure herald of the splendor of the everlasting dawn, He stands forth supremely—the Christ glorifying Himself by glorifying His people—the Christ conquering, ruling, judging, and rewarding.

According to the same Apostle, He was the Eternal Word, who in the beginning was with God and was

God. According to this same Apostle, the Word had become flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And now He is King over all things, leading to everlasting triumph the hosts of God. What wonder that there should echo from the lips of Christ Himself, through all the Apocalypse, this phrase, which seems to contain all the Lord's glorious history: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last!"

The general meaning of the phrase is evident enough. It sets forth the supremacy, the sovereignty, the everlastingness of Christ, the author, the governor, and the goal of all creation. But it is not, we think, too fanciful to perceive in the first clause a particular form in which the general idea is expressed. What, then, we ask, is indicated by this title appropriated by Christ, "I am Alpha and Omega"? Its suggestiveness will appear in the following way. The first and last letters of the alphabet may be used to represent in brief the sum and substance of any subject. Just as we call the elements of any study its A B C, so that which is the all-pervading idea, the centre, the substance of any treatise, would be its Alpha and Omega. It would be found everywhere throughout the volume. It would be implied where it is not expressed. It would be the main theme of which all else would be a variation. Furthermore, language is the expression of thought. When, therefore, Christ declares Him-

self the Alpha and Omega, He declares Himself the sum and substance of expressed thought, the all-pervading and central theme to which utterance has been given. But given by whom? Of whose thought is He the expression? Of whose language is He the theme? There can be but one answer. It is God's thought which He expresses; God's language of which He is the utterance. This, then, is the mighty truth proclaimed in our text—that Christ is the sum and the substance of God's revealed thought. He is the first and the last, for "in the beginning was the Word," and He is "the heir of all things"; He is "the beginning and the end," for "all things were created by Him and for Him." But He is, furthermore, also the Alpha and the Omega, the actual substance, the single, universal theme of God's revealed thought.


Now, in order afterward to exhibit the richness of this truth, let me remind you, first, that, in Bible teaching, the history of the world, both natural and moral, and still more clearly the history of redemption, are but the records in time of God's original thought He has already thought out that which takes place in His creation. The world, in all its parts, is the revelation of the divine mind—of the idea which God had from and before the start. This is simply to say that God is an intelligent and almighty Creator. He is not a force that thrust the world blindly into being. He is not a law that operates like the laws of machines.

He is a person; He is a mind; He thinks; He plans; and so He acts. He devised this creation before He created it. He had the thought before He proceeded to carry it out. "He created all things according to the counsel of His own will." "He purposed" certain things "in Himself." Such is the teaching of Scripture, and of all spiritual religion; so that the ultimate secret of all things consists in God's thought; and the ultimate reason for all events is to be sought in God's original purpose.

Without delaying longer on this point, I will simply remark that this view is the precise opposite of the doctrine of chance. If we believe in a personal God at all, it would seem to be almost impossible to suppose that He either made or governs the world in a haphazard way. Had the world been made by an angel, its author might not have known what would be the result or the history of his own work; just as an inventor may have no idea to what uses his invention will finally be put. But the loftier and the purer our idea of God becomes, the more do we feel that anything like chance must be impossible in His works. We feel that, as the perfect intelligence, He must have had in mind, from the start, all the subsequent history of His creation; we feel that, as the Almighty One, He must have willed the world into being with the intention that all that has come to pass should occur. We look back, therefore, to His eternal thought as the

origin of all accomplished things. We may not be at all able to understand why He has acted as He does, or thought as He has; but we would rather believe in His wisdom, in spite of our inability to understand it, than to be left to the monstrous alternative that He made a world without knowing why He made it, or without intending to do anything particular in it or with it.

And the loftier our idea of the Divine Being, the more do we feel that we can place absolutely no limit upon what was embraced in the scope of His original purpose. We feel, for example, that it must have included the infinitely various world of nature. That world awes us by its vastness; astounds us by the intricate and subtle play of its forces. It overwhelms the imagination by the perfection of its machinery, even under the minutest examination of the microscope. It reveals everywhere the sway of exact law. Men have discovered in it a wonderful play of forces—one force changing into others, while yet the total amount of energy in the universe appears to remain the same. It is an immense unity; each part affects the other parts about it, with the result of producing, in the lapse of ages, an infinite variety of objects instead of the formless chaos to which both Scripture and science point as having been at the beginning. Now we maintain that this natural world has not been produced by chance. I do not necessarily mean that



each object, or each variety, or each species of a thing has been directly created out of nothing by the hand of God. That is another question. But whether that be so, or whether these seem simply to have grown, in either case we hold to the idea that they come into being according to God's original design and under His supervision. To say that there is no evidence of mind in nature is to shut one's eyes to the order which pervades it; to the adaptation to each other of even its most distinct parts; and to forget, in too minute study of its details, the magnificent results which have been reached and which an infinity of chances could not have produced. We prefer the old statement of Scripture: "O Lord, how manifold are Thy works! In wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches."

Then, too, we feel in like manner that human history must have been included in God's original thought. This might, at first, appear more improbable, for the reason that man is a free agent, and therefore it would seem impossible to know beforehand what he would do, and impossible to direct his course without destroying his freedom. And yet a moment's reflection shows the contrary. For, explain it as we may, it is an undeniable fact that the history of man has been one of growth and progress. That progress has been in the direction of material improvement and of increasing knowledge; and not only so, but mankind has been



so controlled by unseen forces that great results for morals, and for religion, and for the human mind, have been accomplished which men never devised themselves. Here, then, is the evident fact that, though men are free, they are governed, they are controlled, they carry out unwittingly great purposes, the drift of which we can often see. This confirms us in the opinion that human history, in all its parts, was included in God's thought before even Adam stood in his earthly Paradise. "He hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation."

And I need scarcely add, that the whole work of redemption was included in God's original thought—that He foresaw and intended to allow the fall of man, though He did not cause the fall; that He intended to allow the dispersion of the nations, and to select as the recipients of His special truth the children of Abraham; that He intended to reveal Himself through the incarnation of His Son, and to apply Christ's redemption in His own way through the work of the Spirit.

The history of the world, therefore, is the record of God's thought. I do not wish to elaborate this idea, but merely to impress it on your minds for the sake of what will follow. I am perfectly aware that it is not an easy idea to explain; that it is not always clear; that

there are facts in the world's history which it often seems to us God could not have intended. But I am sure that it is less difficult to explain these than to adopt the theory of chance. That would banish Him altogether from His creation. That would require draughts on faith in comparison with which faith in God would be child's play. If you stand in the nave of a cathedral, it is evident to your mind that the building was erected for a purpose, and according to one or more architectural ideas. You may not admire the architecture ; you may find fault with the design ; you may be unable to understand why certain features were added and others left out. But as you survey the whole, you would not, because of your criticism upon it, conclude that the building rose by chance. Still less can we believe this of the wide universe. It is God's handiwork. It is God's building. It embodies divine thought. We are forced to agree with the Psalmist that "the counsel of the Lord standeth forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations" ; to believe also the solemn words of the Prophet, that "the Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass ; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand" ; and to accept finally the teaching of the Apostle, of "the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." If there be any darkness to us in His dealings, we should exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of

the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? Or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him *are all things*; to whom be glory forever. Amen."

With then this in mind, we may be prepared for the declaration of Jesus Christ, "I am Alpha and Omega." As I have named some of the many things included in God's revealed thought, you have noticed that the sending of Christ was mentioned as but one of them, and such is the place which He occupies in ordinary thought. He is considered, perhaps, but one among many religious teachers; or if His unique place in redemption be recognized, redemption itself is considered as but one of many purposes for which the world was made, and sometimes not even the most important. But this is not what Christ claimed for Himself, or the Bible for Him; and if I have been able to impress you with the truth that all creation is the unfolding of God's thought, you will be prepared to admit the grandeur of the position which Christ occupies when we are told that, of all that thought of God's which has been revealed, He is the sum and substance. He is its Alpha and Omega.

Let me indicate how the vista of this truth opens in several directions before the mind's eye.

1. In the first place, then, He is the sum and substance of the Bible itself, and so the practical truth, the substance of truth to be believed. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God. They are His language, utterances of His thought, given from time to time, and collected into a volume. They also reveal that plan of salvation which all believers admit to have been devised by God alone. Here, then, is the written record of God's thought. He knew the end of it from the beginning, but little by little did He communicate it to men. It forms a book whose human authors were not aware of the size and extent of the revelation to which they contributed. It contains various methods of teaching—now by the lessons of history, now by the exhortations of the prophets, now by the thunders of law, now by the arguments of acute minds, and again by the examples of holy characters. It treats of various themes—was composed under the most various circumstances and for the most various purposes. God of old times spoke “unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners”; and no less did He so speak through the apostles and evangelists. The book is a mosaic, made by different artists under the unknown direction of a greater than they. It is God's word to man—manifold, complex, and prolonged; and yet when we receive it all, we discover that, of all this mass of revealed thought,

Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the substance and the sum, the stone out of which each piece of the mosaic is taken, and the figure which all the pieces unite to portray.

You may see this by following along the history of the revelation itself. In the earlier parts, indeed, Christ is seldom mentioned. The stream rises among the mountains, a little rivulet, that might be overlooked in the landscape. But slowly and surely it widens. God tells, first, of the woman's seed that would bruise the serpent's head. Then, to Abraham, of his seed, in whom all nations should be blessed. Then, through Jacob, of Shiloh, the prince of peace; through Moses, of the future prophet; through Balaam, of the Rising Star; to David, of his greater Son; through Isaiah, of the suffering Redeemer and the glorious King: and so with louder and still stronger emphasis, till the shadows fly before the rising of the Sun Himself. Then He fills all the firmament. Apostles preach Him; evangelists describe Him; the Spirit in the Church explains and glorifies Him; and, at last, as we have seen, prophecy expires with the vision of Christ in glory coming to judge the world. We realize now that, of the whole book, He is the Alpha and Omega; and looking back to the beginning we can see that though He was but seldom mentioned, He underlay all. In the earliest sacrifices, His sacrifice was implied. The ritual of the tabernacle and the temple anticipated

His coming. All that God taught men of old time was part and parcel of Christ; so that were it lost and He only retained, not one whit of God's thought would perish for mankind.

Or you may see the same thing by examining the system of doctrine revealed in the Bible. Its elements are such as these. It begins with man's sin and guilt, declaring him to be a lost soul. It then tells of God's holiness and justice and love—the holiness which men must imitate, the justice which punishes disobedience, the love which reaches in fatherly tenderness to us, His fallen children. It adds to this the failure of man's efforts to please God, the necessity of an atonement, the immortality of the soul, and eternal rewards and penalties to come. These are the elements, but they all are merged in the single doctrine of the Christ. If in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive. If God be just, Christ has satisfied His justice for every one that believes. If God be love, Christ reveals that love. If God be holy, Christ enables man to become holy likewise. He also brings immortality to light by His resurrection; and according as men do or do not receive Him are they to receive happiness or misery in the future world. Christ, therefore, is the sum and substance of Bible doctrine as well as of Bible history. Everything must be viewed in His light. Everything must be explained by its relation to Him. He is the text on which all else is the comment. He is the truth

of which all else is the application. He is the centre from which all else radiates, and the foundation on which all else rests. Not the decrees of God, not the law of God, not the guilt of man, not immortality, not any of these other truths is the central one; but Jesus Christ is the centre. He implies all the rest; looking at Him, we look at the light itself; we read the whole revelation in a glance. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

2. Then glance in another direction at the vista opened by our text. He is the sum and substance of all human history, and so the guiding principle of all thoughts.

I have already maintained that all history is the unfolding of divine thought. God's purposes embraced not merely the Jews and the Christian Church, but all mankind. He intended to leave the nations for a while to their own ways, as though to prove thereby the impossibility of living aright without His aid; and in the fullness of time to unite them in the faith of the Gospel. We ask, then, whether it is possible to discover in history any movement, embracing all peoples, and leading to one universal goal. At first sight, it might appear impossible. The nations of the world have lived at cross-purposes, have fought furiously against each other, and have differed, the one from the other, in ten thousand ways. Each has seemed to

go its own road, making its own religion, establishing its own laws, working out its own destiny. But is this appearance not deceptive? Is there visible no general movement of humanity in one direction? Have not many barriers been broken down, so as to tend toward the discovery of one human race? Is not also the contrast already great between the separation of people from people which antiquity showed and the amalgamation of all into one which in some measure modern life discloses? Is not the human mind the same everywhere, and cannot we see that the drift of human life is toward some single goal common to all the world?

If so, what is that goal? Once discover it, and you will have the sum and substance of man's history; the object for which he has been made to live. What is it then? Is it mere political unity? That seems as far off as ever. Is it merely secular knowledge, or knowledge applied to the comforts of life? That would leave unchanged the moral nature of man, and the race would continue to show, even when most enlightened, as much crime and sin as now. No, the goal of history is the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Christ! He is its Alpha and Omega.

We can obtain a hint of this by recalling that remarkable combination of circumstances, which Saint Paul called the fullness of time, with which you all



are familiar, and by which Christ came into the world at precisely the moment when natural religion was worn out, when the Jewish Church had ended its mission, when the civilized world had one language to convey the Gospel and one government to protect it. But this is only a hint of a larger truth, namely, that the one divine purpose which runs through all human life is to create the age in which every knee shall bow to Jesus, and in which the human race shall find its perfection of both brain and heart in the Kingdom of God's dear Son. Christ's Kingdom is the end of history. His character, the goal of man. All that conflicts with Him shall be cast out of the world He has redeemed. Only what is Christ-like will survive therein. And as we shall look back upon human life from the glorious future, we shall confess that He was the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the sum and the substance of this world's long, confused life.

3. But I would have you look at this truth in another direction, and this time apply the telescope of God's Word to the vast universe above and beyond our world, for you will find that Christ is the Alpha and the Omega of all creation, and so also the goal to which all leads. We have ascended, step by step, upon the mount of vision, and, as the landscape has widened, have beheld the same figure of Christ, the central object in Patmos and in the world, in the Bible

and in all history. Now we are to gaze beyond earth, and into the starry spaces—back into the silent eternity, up to the throne of God, on into the ages to come, and lo! He, around whom this world gathers, is found to be still the centre of God's creation, the Alpha and Omega of God's thought.

I would that I could convey to you the wonderful impression of the dignity of Jesus Christ which I derive from the pages of God's Word. Let me simply indicate whither our thought should tend. We should turn first to the opening of Saint John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." What means this language, but that the Son of God, who became flesh in Jesus Christ, is so emphatically the revelation of God's thought that He is called literally the Word of God, and that He has been so from the very beginning of all things? Christ is God's utterance; He is all of God's revealed thought. Through Him the Father works. He created the world. He is the world's spiritual light. There is this grand thought conveyed by the Apostle, that God has revealed Himself only through His Son; the Son is the revelation; He is the medium through which God shines forth and acts and loves. To take an imperfect

either the love of followers or with the sullen surrender of beaten enemies, and confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father. And then, we are told, when all things are subdued under Him, shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him, that God may be all in all. You call this speculation: but it is simply the repetition of the statements of God's Word; and from them may we gain the idea that as on earth we have discovered Christ to be the sum and substance of God's thought revealed to us, so will the future prove that He is the sum and substance likewise of all that God has thought concerning all creation; and that in a sense of which we now can see but dimly the grandeur, He will be found to be the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

What a character, then, Christ is! How miserably base appears neglect of Him! How grand is faith, which opens to our poor minds and hearts this Word of God! For I ask if it does not follow from what I have said that Christ ought to be the Alpha and Omega of our thoughts, even as He is of God's. Ought He not to be to us everything? Ought not our lives to centre in Him; our opinions to bow to Him? Ought it not to be our hope to have Christ in us; our reward, to share His glory? If He be the Alpha and the Omega of Scripture, of man's life on earth, aye, of all life of all created beings, then, truly, words

are too weak to express the absolute faith which we should be glad to render. For what, perhaps, is most affecting in Christ's character is that He will deign to be to each of us all that He is to the greatest; that He will be glad to fill our lives and hearts with His majestic but gracious presence; that He desires to be to you and to me the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.

My hearers, this is the question of questions: What is Christ to you? This, the question which decides all destinies; the question on which eternity hinges. This is the question the answer to which, as we have seen, will part good from the bad for all eternity. What is Christ to you? Can you say that for you to live is Christ? Is He to you the Alpha and the Omega, the One for whom you live, in whom you live; the One who is first in your heart and in your real service? He must be! He must be! or your thought will not be God's thought. Hereafter you will submit, but without reward. Submit to Him now! Behold His peerless worth! Make Him your Lord and King! And you will join hereafter with the host who give blessing and honor and dominion unto Him who sitteth on the throne and unto the Lamb forever. You will behold the King in His beauty, and you will say that the half has never been told you of His worth and goodness who is, in Himself, the revelation of God.



### III

#### WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

“What think ye of Christ?”—MATT. xxii. 42.

THIS was one of several occasions on which Jesus confuted His Pharisaic opponents by a question; and in this instance He not only silenced them, but made them appear ridiculous as well. If there was one question which they ought to have been able to answer satisfactorily, it was this, “What think ye concerning the Christ?” Were they not Jews? Were they not doctors of the law? Were they not professed expounders of the Scriptures? And was not the Christ the main object of Hebrew hope; and the doctrine of the Christ the central doctrine of the Old Testament? One would suppose that no new information could have been given them on the inspired teaching of their own Scriptures concerning this main article of their faith. Yet they were silenced by this question, “What think ye of the Christ? whose Son is He? For David in Spirit calleth Him Lord: how is He then His Son?”

We answer at once that He was foretold in the Old Testament, just as He is represented in the New, as both David's Lord and David's Son; “born of the seed

of David according to the flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection of the dead." But if the Messiah was to be divine, why should the Jews upbraid Jesus—since He claimed to be Messiah—for asserting His divinity? Their silence, therefore, proved either that they were not sincere in their opposition to His doctrine, and were governed simply by unconquerable hatred of His person; or else that they did not understand their own Scriptures. If the latter, they appeared in a ridiculous light. If the former, their true spirit was unmasked, and their opposition to Jesus was reduced to simple wickedness and selfishness.

The whole theory, in short, upon which they were acting was shown to be unfounded and insincere by this searching, yet simple, question. And we have only to change a little our point of view in order to make the same question equally pertinent now. Any theory upon which a man pretends to govern his conduct must account for all the important facts or else be confuted by them. When a scientific man, for example, propounds a theory in explanation of any of the phenomena of nature, if you can put your finger on one fact pertaining to the subject in hand and show that his theory does not agree with that fact, you have so far proved the insufficiency of the theory. If a lawyer be making out his theory of the case which he is defending, his opponent will

be likely to make short work of it if he can point out one important fact which the advocate's theory does not explain. Precisely so is it with men's theories of life and duty. Jesus Christ is, confessedly, the central figure of the world's moral history. He has to be taken, therefore, into the account; He cannot be left out. And every theory of life, whether merely moral or distinctly religious, must be prepared to answer the old question by which the Jewish rulers were silenced, "What, then, think ye of the Christ?" A good many of our modern, popular teachers simply leave Him alone. They have nothing to say of Him at all. But they cannot fairly do this: and I fancy that it would bring not a few back to their senses, and would hold up to ridicule not a few theories by which paper is wasted and lives are ruined, if men were compelled to give their serious answer to this question.

I desire, then, to put the question to you at once, especially in its bearing on the common ideas of our day; and, first, I will try to show the importance of the question; yea, the absolute necessity under which men are of being able to give a plain and direct answer to it.

In order to this, observe, on the one hand, that Christ is the kernel of Christianity—its living centre; its radical principle; its creative thought.

He is obviously the kernel of the Bible. Abstract



Him from it, and it remains a mere shell. Take Him from it and you take away its central thought—the idea about and upon which all its parts are built. He is the soul of the Bible. Hebrew history, of which the Old Testament gives the record, narrates God's preparation of His Church for the coming of Christ—her intellectual preparation, to understand Him; her moral preparation, to follow Him. The New Testament describes His advent and life, what the apostles taught about Him, and man's duties in view of His advent. The Bible is not primarily the revelation of God as He is in Himself, although it reveals Him to us. It is not primarily the history of man's religious progress, although it discloses this also. It is not primarily a book of morals, although it teaches the highest morality. It is not a philosophy, although it involves a philosophy. The Bible, as a matter of fact, centres in Christ. It is the revelation of God in Christ, of man's salvation through Christ, of morality as exemplified and taught by Christ, and of philosophy as implied in Christ.

I need not dwell on this familiar fact. You might as well take Hamlet out of Shakespeare's play, or Cæsar out of Roman history, or the sun out of the solar system, as Christ out of the Bible. Now, let us remember that the Bible was written at intervals through a period of fifteen hundred years; that it is the literary monument of a long movement which has affected more

profoundly than has any other movement the life of humanity. Let us add the remembrance that the Bible, as a whole and when gathered in a single volume, has been the religious teacher of the most civilized and progressive and practically religious portions of the race. Must we not admit at least the supreme importance of the question, which takes us to the root-thought from which all this has sprung, and feel that no intelligent man ought to be without his answer to the query, "What think ye of Christ?"

But, furthermore, Christ is not only the kernel of the book which we call the Bible, but He is the kernel also of that system of belief which constitutes the Christian creed. The Christian creed is not a number of independent articles of belief tied together by the Church, like a bundle of sticks tied together by a string. It is a system of belief in which every part grows out of one central truth, as the branches of a tree grow out of the trunk. It is a fact of history that the definite statement by the Church of this system grew out of the questions concerning its belief in Jesus Christ and the logical inferences drawn from it; and the historian can trace the progress of the Church's apprehension of what is taught in the Bible along the line of its faith in its great Founder. The consequence is that if a man tell you what he thinks of Christ, you can tell pretty clearly what he thinks about all the other principal points of Christianity.

If, for example, he tell you that he thinks Christ was a mere man, good but not divine, a teacher but not a Saviour (in the sense in which we call Him such), then you can infer at once that the speaker does not believe in the Trinity, nor in the fall of man, nor in the Atonement, nor in the inspiration of the Bible, nor in regeneration, nor probably in the doctrine of future punishment. If Christ be not divine, then, of course, there is no Trinity. If Christ be not divine, then, of course, His death was not an atonement for human guilt. If no atonement for guilt be necessary, then, of course, man is not lost, nor does he need the power of the Holy Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God, nor is it likely that he will be punished for his sins in the future world. If, finally, Christ be a mere man, then the Bible can scarcely be deemed inspired of God, at least not in such sense as to be an infallible teacher of truth; for manifestly and, in our day, confessedly, it teaches that before His birth in Bethlehem He was the Son of God. I am not now contending for the truth of these doctrines. I am simply pointing out their connection with each other, and trying to show that the Christian creed is a unit and not a bundle of sticks, and that the whole of it depends on the answer which we give to the question, "What think ye of Christ?" That question takes us to the root of the tree, to the heart of the creed.

But it does even more than this. It takes us to the

kernel of the Christian life. Of course, this must be so if the creed be a real belief; but it is worth noting separately. The distinctive thing which makes a man experimentally a Christian is his thought about Christ. It is not his belief in God; for a man may believe in God and yet not be a Christian. It is not his belief in moral obligation; for he may believe in the whole decalogue and yet not be a Christian. It is not his belief in the Church; for he may believe in the Church as an institution, and may serve her zealously, and yet not be a Christian. It is not his belief in the Bible, apart from what the Bible teaches concerning Christ. It is his belief in Christ; and this not merely his intellectual belief about Christ, but his personal acceptance of Christ and trust in Him as a Saviour.

Paul may fairly be taken as an example of what a Christian is, and he said: "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Observe that his faith was in Christ, in Christ as the Son of God, in Christ as his Saviour, in Christ as his personal Saviour; and that this was not a mere intellectual conviction, but a practical life. "I *live* by the faith of the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave Himself for me." So is it still. To be a Christian, you do not have to begin by accepting, still less by understanding, all the articles of the creed. You do not become a Christian by uniting with the Church, nor by reforming your bad habits. You become a Christian

by accepting Christ with your mind and your heart; and all the new world of light which opens about a new convert is caused by the new thoughts which he has concerning his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Thus Christ is the kernel of Christianity, historically and experimentally, in theology and in daily life. But more than this, He is the great, and absolutely the best test of a man's moral character. This is the second fact which shows the importance of the question given in the text.

What we mean by it may be made to appear more clearly by the aid of some illustrations. Suppose an instructor, desiring to test the real degree of education to which a pupil has attained. He cannot do better than to take some particular author, for example, and ask the pupil's opinion of him. What does he think of Wordsworth's Ode? The reply will show the degree of knowledge and the kind of taste possessed by the pupil. Or if we may take an illustration from the political field, we should say that you cannot test an Englishman's political sentiments more accurately than by asking, What does he think of Gladstone? or a German's, than by asking, What does he think of Bismarck? The reply will reveal at once his political sympathies. So if you hold a magnet amongst a pile of mixed iron and wooden particles, the iron will cling to the magnet and the wood will remain unmoved. Thus you dis-

cover not only the power of the magnet, but also the character of the materials amongst which it is held.

In a similar way Christ tests men's moral character. The question, *What think you of Christ?* shows what sort of man you are. Not, of course, if we only mean what your public profession is or your theoretical notions are; but certainly if we mean what is your real thought, your inner attitude of mind. All that really sympathizes with goodness must sympathize with Him when He is fairly beheld. All that hates holiness must hate Christ too. He said to Pilate, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." And it is even so. The worst comment that can be made upon a man is that he rejects or dislikes Jesus Christ. It is his self-condemnation. If you were to separate every act of a man's life and every movement of his mind, and exactly weigh and measure each in the scale of an infallible divine judgment, and were to sum up the results with the accuracy of omniscience itself, you could not more certainly decide the moral worth of a character than you could by obtaining its sincere answer to this question, *What think you of Christ?* That would tell all the story at once. And that is a question which every one of us may ask himself and so at once learn his condition in the sight of Almighty God.

We have, therefore, this one question to ask of all theories on which men are living. We ask it of

science. We certainly have no quarrel with science, but glory in her advancement. But when some man in the name of science produces a theory which he asserts will furnish the only true philosophy of life, then we ask, Well, on your theory, what think you of Christ? And if he replies that his theory compels him to answer that Christ was a mistaken or even merely an upright man, we reply that his theory cannot be true; that the testimony to what Christ really was is too strong to be doubted, and that whatsoever conflicts with it is thereby disproved. We ask the same question of the moralist. You say it is only necessary to keep the decalogue, to be just and kind, in order to be saved. Well, what think you of Christ? Your theory does not fit Him. He does not fit into it. He manifestly believed differently, and lived as He believed; and yet He is without controversy the model of manhood. This question tears moralism up by the roots. In the face of Christ's life it cannot be the right theory of living. So we might go on. I do not believe that there is one here who can put the question honestly to himself without feeling that it touches the very foundation of his character; that it discloses to him infallibly his real condition; that it either gives him reason for terror before God or reason for joy and hope, so that, as with the Pharisees, his whole life is sifted thoroughly when I ask him, "What think you of Christ?"

What answer, then, should we ourselves give to this question? Let me suggest in turn some of the answers which might be made in such an audience as this, and let us judge of the sufficiency of these replies in the light of the importance of the question as we have already learned it.

Perhaps even here there are some who would reply only doubtfully, We think Him an interesting historical character. This is the response often made by the merely literary student. Without in any way accepting Jesus as a Saviour, or even professing to belong to His religion, such a one is unable to withhold from Him a certain degree of intellectual homage. He sees the force of what we have advanced concerning Christ's place in history, in the Bible, and in Christianity. He admits that such a character cannot be passed by with neglect. Intellectual curiosity itself stimulates him to examine the real facts of such a life. It is a response also caught up by others who have little or no intelligent idea of what Jesus taught and did, but who hear so much about Him that they feel forced to regard Him as a remarkable personage. There is nothing easier than to substitute a well-framed eulogy of some minor quality of Christ for the sincere confession of His greater claim, and with this substitute to rest content.

It is not unfrequent to find men who wholly deny His divinity and His original teaching, loud in a pa-




tronizing praise of His humanity and His liberal views. They can hardly avoid so much. The evident nobility of character revealed in the story of Jesus compels this much of interest in Him. He evidently was a man who rose far above selfishness and worldliness; a man who, although belonging to a narrow race, had broad views; a man, also, who with marvelous purity taught others to worship God. He certainly effected a great change in the history of the world. Though His life was that of a wandering Jewish teacher and His death the shameful death of the cross, yet His name in a few years was written on the grave of the old pagan world and on the standards of the Empire. The enthusiasm which He evoked and evokes still,—the multitudes who find in Him their inspiration to all that is good and pure,—His own gentleness and sympathy, combined with stern self-consecration and unflinching obedience to duty,—all these and a hundred other facts mark Him out from among the characters of history as the most wonderful and interesting of them all.

Renan closes his ridiculous and blasphemous life of Jesus, in which he has sought to reduce the story to the level of a romantic novel, with these admiring words: "Whatever be the surprises of the future, Jesus will never be surpassed; His worship will grow young without ceasing; His legend will call forth tears without end; His sufferings will melt the noblest

hearts; all ages will proclaim that among the sons of men there is none born greater than Jesus."

Do you think in this way of Christ? But what does it all amount to? What change do these thoughts make in your life? What relation do you sustain to this remarkable character of history? Does your admiration make you any more like Him? Does it make you live any nearer to God? Does it lead you to help on the cause of Jesus Christ? If not, what is it worth? We answer, Nothing,—except to convict you of inconsistency,—to condemn you out of your own mouth. Here you stand before the most remarkable character of history,—before the grandest moral movement of all time,—before Him who in some way moves more hearts Godward than any other,—and you dare to take the position of an indifferent critic and to say complacently, Truly, this is a very interesting spectacle! Is that a position for a reasonable man to take? You would better not allow this interesting spectacle to depart from you until you have found out what it means for you.

But another will perhaps say in answer to our question: "I think Christ a remarkable religious teacher, probably the best religious teacher who has ever lived, but I do not believe that He has been correctly represented by the Church,—I do not believe that the New Testament correctly represents Him. My idea is that He was a simple Jewish peasant, of



unusual religious insight, who had a real genius for moral teaching, who loved God and man with a super-eminent love, and whose substantial doctrine is expressed in the Golden Rule and in the summary of duty, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself.' I think that He was led unwisely to play the role of a Messiah, while yet He was in a true sense the Messiah, because He taught true doctrine. He was put to death by the Jewish rulers from jealousy of His popularity; but His disciples afterwards, having been persuaded that He had risen from the dead, began to deify Him, and attributed to Him gradually all that the New Testament teaches and the Church holds concerning Him. I think that His moral and spiritual teaching should be lovingly followed. I think it wonderful that He should have taught so purely and so nobly. I think that all later notions should be laid aside, and that we should learn from Jesus the love of God and the love of man, and should try to live as simply and as beautifully as He seems to have done."

Do you think in this way of Christ? Let me point out a difficulty in your thought. It is this. What do you know about Jesus and His teaching except as it is reported in the New Testament? People say, We will listen to Jesus but we will not listen to His disciples. I answer, How can you listen to Jesus

except as you listen to the reports made by His disciples? Who wrote these gospels? Matthew, John—apostles: Mark, Luke—companions and friends of apostles, who gave their apostolic testimony. What else do you know about Jesus? Have you some independent means of information? Have you discovered some lost manuscript containing another account? You know nothing about Him except as you believe the apostles. But if they are untrustworthy in one respect, why not in another? If they put into His mouth words which He did not utter, how can you receive any of them? No, you must take all or none. You cannot pick and choose. You cannot distinguish between the veracity of Jesus and the veracity of His apostles.

“Yes, but I can,” you say. “I will take this Gospel story and I will expunge from it everything miraculous and supernatural and I will accept what is left. I cannot believe in miracles. I admit that there must have been some foundation for what the Gospels record, but I think it more natural to suppose that Jesus was such a man as I have described and that the disciples added the miraculous and supernatural element to the story.” But is not this a very arbitrary position to take up? Do you really think it fair to assume that no miracle ever took place no matter what evidence for it is provided? Does it not seem evident to you that if God did send His Son

into the world, some miraculous signs would be likely to occur? Do you really know so much about the laws of the natural world as to be prepared to affirm, "I will never believe in miracles"? And, furthermore, how can you account for the fact that almost immediately after the death of Jesus, when His disciples began to preach to the people, they laid stress not only upon His moral teachings, but on His miracles and the supernatural side of His life? Read Peter's speech at Pentecost. Read the other speeches recorded in the Acts. Read still more the early Epistles of Paul. In them you will find the Church's idea of Christ full grown. Now it requires time to make myths and to construct legends. In ancient nations mythology was the growth of centuries. But in this case you have to suppose that in a few months what you dare to call the Christian mythology sprang into being in the minds of a few forlorn Jews who were being persecuted for teaching it. No, you cannot forcibly separate the teaching of Christ and that of His apostles. You must take the Christ of the Gospels, or have no Christ at all, or else manufacture one out of your own fancy to suit yourself. You cannot think thus of Christ. You must take Him as He is delivered unto you, or else say, We will not think of Him at all.

How, then, should we think of Christ? Can we do better than think of Him as His own apostles did?

Paul wrote, "When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." "He is our peace who hath made both one—that He might reconcile both unto God, in one body by the cross." "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. For He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin,—that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Peter confessed at Cæsarea Philippi, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." "To whom can we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." And in his First Epistle he quotes the language of Isaiah, applying it to Jesus, and saying, "Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example." Then John writes in his Gospel still more explicitly, "In the beginning was the Word," "and the Word was God," "and the Word became flesh." Standing in the exile of Patmos, the same apostle declares that he beheld the Redeemer on whose breast he had leaned, clothed in indescribable glory, and heard Him say, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore."

They thought thus of Christ, and so should we think of Him. This was the truth on which Christianity was founded. This is the truth by which it lives to-day.

I bring it to you not as a new doctrine of theology. I bring it as a fact of history, which has tremendous meaning to every one of us. It means that, though lost, the way of redemption is open to us. It means that God has descended in His Son into the plain of life, and with Him as our helper we may live forever and not die. It means that you have only to cast yourself by faith upon the Mighty One, this Christ of God, and be saved even to the uttermost. It means that no sin is greater than the sin of rejecting Christ. It means that you may say from the heart, "Rock of ages, cleft for me." Victims as you are of sore temptation, trembling as you do on the verge of eternity, immortal and accountable as you are, here is your Saviour.

I have tried to show you the importance of this question. I have shown that this is the kernel of the Bible, the kernel of Christianity, and the test of character; and if Christ be what the apostles declared, you can well understand why He is the central theme and thought of all the ages. So I ask you personally, What think you of Christ? I would press home the question. It is like a surgeon's knife, which cuts deeply and skillfully. It is God's home-thrust. You cannot parry it. You must answer it, if not now, then at the judgment day. What think you of Christ? You men, busy with your professions and your trades—you women, in the home circle and in social pleasures—you bitter doubters and you sufferers from pain

and death—you all who need so sorely to have heaven brought into your lives now, that when your lives are ended you may enter heaven—what think ye of Christ? Think of His peerless character, think of His tender sympathy, think of His anguish on the cross, think of His resurrection and His glory now! He is your God-sent Saviour, and will you not accept Him? You need naught but Him. You are complete in Him. Will you not give Him your hearts and your service? Think much of Him. Take Him for your friend. Confess Him and work for Him, and He will confess you. What one of you to-night will say, as you think of Christ, He is my Saviour, my Lord and my God?





## IV

### TOUCHING CHRIST

“And they besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.”—  
MATT. xiv. 36.

WHAT an inspiring scene this was! For the moment we see the man of Nazareth at the height of popularity, traversing His native land like a conqueror, while from all the adjacent district throngs of enthusiastic people gather to welcome Him and implore His blessing. He had just astonished the multitude by feeding five thousand men from a few loaves and fishes; and we know that that miracle produced such an impression that some were for taking Jesus by force and making Him king. The power of the hostile rulers was now at the minimum and Christ's at its maximum, and it would not have been hard, had He wished to do so, for the Saviour to have swept Galilee and Judea by a wave of patriotism, and have placed Himself, as the Maccabees had done, at the head of the nation.

And now, after that famous miracle, and after He had still further amazed His own disciples by walking to them on the stormy waves, He landed the

next morning on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and began to journey rapidly through fields and villages toward the city of Capernaum. As He advanced the throngs of attendants increased until His march became a veritable triumph. They seem to have hastened to avail themselves at once and in every possible way of His unlimited power. They brought their sick friends and laid them by the side of the road along which Jesus was coming. At every village a new crowd awaited Him. At every cross-road, on the banks and in the fields by the way, there stood little companies around some victim of disease ready to thrust the patient on the notice of Jesus. Yonder we see one sick of the palsy borne by friends, or reaching a trembling arm in supplication for relief; yonder, too, another coming from a fever-bed; there, one possessed, chained, perhaps, and led unwillingly to Him at whose word even devils trembled and obeyed; and again the leper, at a distance from the road, seeking to conceal himself from the people but to show himself to the Christ, and raising his shrill voice in prayer for pity. And to all the desired help comes. As many as touched Him were made perfectly whole, and many, too, we doubt not, who could not touch Him save by the hand of faith.

The scene, I say, is one to rouse our own enthusiasm, as it did that of the people. It was as truly a triumphal march as that which afterward Christ made

over Olivet into Jerusalem, The word "triumph" is the only one which is worthy to be given it, but it significantly contrasts with such triumphs as those with which the world has honored its illustrious men. What a contrast, for example, between these journeys of Jesus and a Roman triumph! We picture the great capital dressed in its holiday garments; the peasants of Italy thronging with the citizens the narrow streets; the whole populace abandoning itself to joy and often license. We picture the triumphal procession: golden chariots drawn by white horses; garlands of flowers scattered in profusion under the wheels of the hero's car; the bronzed legions who survive from the long and fierce war; and in the centre of all, the proud commander who has made barbarians tremble at the name of Rome, and who now haughtily condescends to receive the gratitude of his fellow-citizens. But as the procession wends its way up the Capitoline hill that the Cæsar may offer his sacrifice to the god, we note amid his train the slaves torn from distant homes to become his chattels; we note the scars borne by his warriors in testimony of the awful perils of battle; we think of others left dead in the far East or on the bleak shores of the northern sea; we fear that by such a display as this the Cæsar is riveting fetters on the liberties of his country; and we conclude for all its emblazoned pomp that this is in reality the triumph of mere passion, ambition, cruelty and crime.

But as we behold the triumph of Jesus, how different our thought! It is the triumph of love, it is the deliverance of the captive; it scatters healing benedictions on its way; it is the proclamation of liberty from God. And surely we must feel that the round globe has never seen so grand a march as this hasty walk of the humble Son of God through Galilee to Capernaum. This surely was the day of which the prophet wrote, "Arise, shine; for thy Light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

Now I wish, of course, to regard this scene as picturing a spiritual truth. It is our belief that Christ is now the one source of all spiritual blessings to mankind; that He is as truly present among men now as when He walked the roads of Galilee; that it is as possible now to touch Him as it was then; and that we are as likely to receive the influence of His power. This is the central fact and doctrine of Christianity. Christ is the center of all good; and the one need of human hearts, in their weakness and sin, is to be brought into personal, loving contact with this Son of God and man. Hence the significance for all time of such a scene as this; and if I can show you how man may touch Christ, and where Christ is to be found, it will not be in vain that we have looked upon this picture from His earthly life.

Let us note, first, the spirit and temper which these people displayed. From it may we gather what is

the state of mind in which we may hope to come, in our way, likewise into personal contact with Jesus Christ. We may infer, at the start, that the experience of Christ's presence depends on ourselves. He is always here and everywhere; and, therefore, the reason why some touch and are blessed by Him, and others do not, is because of the difference in the state of mind between the two classes. The spiritual discovery of Christ is dependent on our own hearts, just as contact with truth of any kind depends on us, not on it. He is always ready to make Himself known, but we are not always ready to perceive Him. From the minds of these Galilean peasants we may learn the great secret. The scene before us may be likened to a revival of religion; and we all know that in the latter we discover the tests and the means of finding God. We realize that success in the great search turns on what we are; and hence the first thing to be learned is, what must there be in our hearts to open the way to the feet of Jesus.

I say, "in our hearts;" for we should find that to touch Christ really is far more the work of the heart than of the intellect. It is sometimes imagined that He can be found through mere investigation and reason. This is the way of the student. He follows the path of history back to the spot where Christ is met. He investigates His life; examines the con-


ditions of His age; seeks to sift the evidence for His reported works and sayings: and concludes forthwith that Jesus either is or is not what His followers assert. Such a process is necessary, and should be undertaken by all who can undertake it; but be it remembered that it is not personal contact with Christ. The investigation may result in the fullest confession of Christ's truth, and yet the investigator may not have touched Him in any spiritual sense. With his intellectual conviction he may turn away almost as little helped in soul by the influence of Jesus as though he had gazed at Him from a great distance.

On the other hand, it is sometimes imagined that the soul will necessarily touch Christ by using those introductory appliances of religion in which Christ's people are wont to express their love and faith. I mean the ordinances of religion—the word, the Church, the sacraments, prayer. In all of these, as I shall show directly, Christ is to be found; but not necessarily, and never if we use them in the wrong way. Again, therefore, we are thrown back on our own hearts, as that on which the touching of Christ depends. They are the eyes, with which we see, and the ears, with which we hear. They are the fingers, with which we reach forward. If a man would find the benefit of Christ, would feel Christ's influence for good, he must, first of all, see that his own heart is

in such a state as, from our text, we learn that the hearts of these Galilean peasants were. It is a matter of individual spiritual life.

When we consider them, we find that the conditions of the soul's touching Christ are very simple, and consist of but two things: on the one hand, a real, earnest, honest desire for Christ's gift, and, on the other, implicit confidence that He can and will give it. Desire and trust: that is all the secret. Real want and simple trust. What easier than these, one would think! And yet how they probe into and reprove our common ways of seeking Him!

For the desire which succeeds in finding Christ is no languid, half-hearted wish, but real spiritual longing. Look again at the scene pictured in the text. Those people clearly knew what they wanted. They had certain specific ills for which they sought relief. These ills were the pressing afflictions of their lives—matters, perhaps, of life and death to them; and their desire for Christ's gift had all the intensity in it with which a man seeks health and strength. If this be the type of an inquirer's mind, how different is it from what we commonly behold. We cannot see the hearts of men; but only here and there do we seem to see those who long for Christ and God as for their lives, and hence it is no wonder that so few possess the key which will open the door of His presence-chamber. And, moreover, in this matter we






should remember that our desire should be directly for Christ's blessing. We often err in this. We want the consequences of religion, but not religion itself. We want the gain of godliness, but not godliness itself. We desire deliverance from punishment, but not deliverance from sin. In our text, however, the diseases of which these Galileans complained are pictures of our spiritual diseases, of our sins and weaknesses, and, therefore, the desire which finds Christ must be for their cure. No man will ever really touch the mighty Saviour who is not filled with a longing for a pure, Christ-like life so strong as to be the chief motive of his mind.

Is it not true that God is always found less by the intellect than by the heart? You may prove His existence and discuss His nature by the reason; but you know Him by the heart. You may likewise prove and discuss a doctrine of Christianity, such as that of the Providence of God; but you never feel it to be true till in your life you discover that He actually has led and protected you. You may prove and investigate a force of nature, determine its power and its properties; but you cannot know it thus as you would do if you used it for practical purposes or came under its actual influence. And so it is with God. The pure in heart, they shall see Him. They that seek for Him as silver and search as for hid treasure, they shall find out the knowledge of God. He reveals Himself to the heart

of man. We feel Him; we do not see Him. We experience Him; we do not merely demonstrate Him. You will come far nearer God by sinking into the depths of a pure heart than by ascending to the loftiest height of philosophy and reason. And, therefore, with His Son the same rule holds. Earnest desire, the longing of a heart for holiness, the sincere wish to be free from the moral disease of life—this is the strength of arm by which we may touch. By this, and by this alone, are we able to exert aright that faith which in its turn is the hand which we actually lay on the hem of His garment as He passes by.

Then, to our desire we must add implicit trust, in order to come into close and helpful contact with the Lord Jesus. If a man have real, earnest longing for Christ's gift, and then simply trust Christ's promise, he is sure to find Christ able to save, and Christ will fill that man's heart with His blessing, and he will feel that he has found the source and giver of spiritual life. Truly, it is marvellous how simple are the means by which the greatest good possible to man may be had. It was a simple thing to touch the hem of Christ's garment, and yet the very simplicity of the act attests the strong confidence these people had in His power. It is a no less simple thing to rest upon His power and promise now; and yet this also attests a strong and childlike confidence.



Of course, the doubting spirit will at once rise up and say, You are believing with the credulity of children. You are trusting without any guarantee. What you imagine to be Christ's blessing, is in truth but the product of your own mind. Even if so, we reply, the product is a good one, come whence it may; better far than the product of doubt. But it is not credulity. If there has ever been any one who, by character and by His acts, and by the world's knowledge of Him, has proved Himself worthy of confidence, that person is Jesus. Was it credulity in these Galilean peasants to trust Him, when on the day before He had fed five thousand men with five loaves and a few fishes? And is it credulity in us to trust Him, when through eighteen hundred years He has fed and blessed millions more? We think not; and we are sure that the light and peace and purity which flow into our hearts when by faith they touch Jesus are not illusions, but are the real fulfillment of His promise and the proof of His claim that "all power and authority are His, in heaven and on earth."

If these conditions be present, it is possible, I say, to touch Jesus Christ. There will be all the effect as if the touch were physical. The mind will grasp His thought, the heart respond to His command, the truth dawn clear and bright. Here, then, is the way to perform this sublime act. Christ Jesus is not inaccessible. These poor, conscience-smitten, sinful

souls about us may feel the virtue of the great Healer. He is nigh unto all them that call upon Him. He is with us always, even to the end of the world. There is this remedy for human ill and sin, and it will be as glad a day for a man now if he touch in reality the mighty Christ as it was for those men and women of Galilee. Real desire and simple faith—these are the whole secret. Faith the hand, and desire the strength which extends the hand. Only believe; only accept it as true, and it will prove itself to be true. This is the lesson which, with all our culture and knowledge, we have need to learn from the afflicted crowds on which on that bright day the healing power fell from Jesus as He passed through His native land.


But you will ask, Where is Christ to be found? On what road is He now journeying; what corners and through what villages will He be likely to pass? So we may imagine the Galilean peasants asking, and in similar phrase is the question put still. We might reply, of course, that He is everywhere, and this would undoubtedly be true. And yet He still would be a vague and indistinct figure to many minds. It is hard to grasp the thought of omnipresence. We must localize even divinity itself, and there are by God's good providence certain places where Jesus is expected to be found, and where our desire and faith may sensibly lay hold upon Him. There are stations, as it were, on the great world's highway; and to come to

these in order to touch Jesus is the special invitation that we bring.

So we say that with desire and faith you may touch Christ in the Bible. Were we to take you without explanation into a great palace, show you its massive walls, its magnificent corridors and halls, and point out the handiwork of ancient days, and then show how posterity has added to the art and invention of antiquity, you would ask, For whom is all this magnificence, and to whom does the structure belong? The answer would be given by taking you finally into the presence of the king. So when science shows you the marvels of the human body, explains how the tissue is a mass of minute cells, how the blood courses through the arteries and veins, how each bone and muscle has its exact part to play, and how nature has lavished its choicest skill in the construction of such a delicate machine, you naturally ask, For what purpose has this wonderful organism been made? And we think that in spite of all skepticism we should be right in answering, it has been made for the habitation of an immortal soul; and though you cannot see or touch the soul, the body is but the soul's garment, through which its power issues forth.

In much the same way would we lead you to the Bible. We show you in it a piece of literature whose early parts reach back in date of composition to remote ages. We show you choice historical records,

the literature of a people which has affected more than any other the moral sentiment of the world. Here are materials for research the like of which are scarcely matched by the hieroglyphs of Egypt or the bricks of Nineveh. Here are ancient songs that utter the noblest aspirations of the human heart; and here are prophetic visions by which the eye of antiquity looked dimly into the future. Above all, here is a sturdy, inflexible love of righteousness, faith in God and in His government, which stand in marked contrast to all other literature that has descended from the remote past. And now by a singular providence the literature has been completed by the story of the early days of the Gospel, and the whole has been preserved and united into one volume, and if you ask why, we answer that it may reveal and explain and exhibit Jesus Christ. For nothing else has it been done, since this purpose includes all lesser ones. He is its Alpha and its Omega. I need not demonstrate this, though I am persuaded that few have any just idea of how extensively and completely Christ underlies the surface of Scripture. You may find Him everywhere. It is Christ who sanctifies the Bible. It is Christ who certifies to us that the Bible is from God. It is Christ who gives the Bible its value, its power to purify society, its authority to regulate belief. Never can I impress too deeply on your minds the truth that He is the sum and the substance, the



author and the subject, the centre and the soul of this great Book.

Now if a man have no deep desire for Christ and have a skeptical, doubting spirit concerning Christ, he may come to the Bible itself and possibly not touch Jesus. It may be that its nobility of sentiment and the influence of its subject will overcome his doubt. But it may not; just as I suppose that some even among those Galilean peasants sneered at the enthusiasm and faith of their companions, and of course won no benefit, even as they asked for none. But my point now simply is that desire and faith do touch Christ in the Bible. They find themselves satisfied with His character and with His promises. He is such a Saviour as they need. They find themselves purified and elevated by contact with Him. He inspires their noblest thoughts; He overcomes the power of sin; He shines as a light in the midst of darkness. Oh, what multitudes can testify this day that they have thus met and touched Jesus Christ and have been healed by Him.

Moreover, we say that desire and faith may touch Jesus in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We do not, indeed, belong to the number of those who hold that the Lord's Supper conveys some mysterious benefit which cannot elsewhere be had. We believe quite the contrary. God has not limited His grace to such formal channels. Just as we believe that God

may be known elsewhere than in the Bible, as we believe that nature is eloquent with His praises and the human conscience echoes His law, so do we believe that Christ may be approached in other ways, and be, in His own language, eaten by other means than in the sacrament. But at the same time, as the Bible more clearly reveals God than nature and conscience do, so does the soul often draw nearer to Christ in the Supper than at other times. It is a service of His own commanding, and the very loyalty which leads a man for Christ's sake to observe it is likely to insure a special benediction therein. It sets Him forth also by the aid of visible symbols, and so leads the mind, which always needs help in grasping things invisible, into a more vivid sense of divine things. In short, here is an appointed place and time for meeting Christ, an appointment which I think no sin-sick soul ought to neglect, and in which multitudes have found peace and comfort.

And it is evident that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is emphatically the exhibition of Christ. What gives it power? That its minister is an ordained man? No. It could be celebrated with as much benefit by those on whom no ordaining hands have ever been laid. Does its power lie in a priestly blessing, in a miracle of change, in any unnatural fact behind the obvious symbols themselves? It does not. Does it lie, then, in some special



virtue in the recipient, in his goodness, his fitness, his moral likeness to Christ? Again we answer, not so,—save as by fitness be meant that desire and faith which we have already found to be the universal condition of touching Christ, and which here, as elsewhere, are necessary. Wherein, then, lies the power of the sacrament? We answer, in its exhibition of Christ. He is “represented, sealed, and applied to believers.” Here men realize what He was and is, what He did and does. Here the soul by vivid signs and pictures, and by the aid, we doubt not also, of the Holy Spirit, lays hold, as we say, on Him. It touches Him. It looks upon His face. It feels its true position in His sight. It believes His word. It feeds on His flesh and blood. It eats the living manna, and it may know, as multitudes again have found, that he that eateth His flesh and drinketh His blood, by real faith, hath eternal life. This is the bread of God that came down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die.

Nor are the Scriptures and the Sacraments the only places by any means where Jesus may be met and touched. At every spot where men engage in prayer and earnest thought there is Jesus to be found. I presume that every earnest Christian here has found that at times his prayer and meditation have been barren and formal, while at other times they have been full of power and refreshment. The spiritual life is

subject to a like change of mood with the common mental life. It has its ebb and its flood tides, its good and its poor seasons, its rainy and its dry months. There are times when we may be said to wander long and far in search of the great Healer; and again there are times when we can go directly to His feet. This is true of prayer, and the same holds true, likewise, of thought or meditation.

I doubt if most of us realize as we should that meditation is as much a means of grace as prayer. We are too busy, commonly, to think long upon religious themes; we are too weary with daily work to think hard upon them; and so our lives are not fruitful, until by some event God forces us to think, and it may be to think bitterly. Earnest thought is as much a place of meeting with Jesus as is the mercy seat: and yet it, too, has its times of power and of barrenness. Now the mind cannot fix itself on divine things, or can do so only in a cold and formal way; and now again, thought springs unbidden to the mind; memory paints its glowing pictures, and a keen intelligence of the Spirit interprets and applies them: and in so doing the soul draws near to God.

What, then, we ask, is the secret of the power of prayer and meditation? What is it that in its successful moments the praying and thinking soul finds? On what, on whom, has faith laid its living hand? What form is that, which in the darkness, we feel but

cannot see? What influence is this which surrounds us like a breath of heavenly air? Whence comes this strength, this joy, this vision of infinite brightness? Ah, poor soul that does not know the magic form! This is Jesus, who was dead and is alive again, and now is fulfilling His promise of perpetual presence. To touch the Son of God thus is the highest glory which a man can have. He has seen the Lord. He has touched the Lord, and he has obtained what ought to be to him the strongest possible evidence that Christ is able to save. How, then, can he doubt it? Once, perhaps, like Thomas, he cried, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails and thrust my hand into His side I will not believe." But now to him as to Thomas, Christ has revealed Himself. He has said in effect, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing." He has made Himself known to His disciples as He does not unto the world. Their desire and faith have found Him in prayer and thought, and they may again exclaim with Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

Now I have pointed out to you how and where Christ may be met and touched; and I have only to add that it is as true now as of old that "as many as touch Him are made perfectly whole." We might describe the joy which filled many hearts on

that fair morning in Galilee when the sick and the helpless, whom friends had put in the way of Jesus, sprang up in the vigor of restored health. We should see here a leper, scarcely believing that his awful curse was gone; there a victim of possession, marvelling at the pure and natural life which he had found again; the blind gratefully beholding the blessed face of Him who was indeed God's messenger to him, and thinking it more beautiful than even those of friends or than the fair scene about him. What joy, we say, came that day to many homes in Galilee, as the gift of the Son of man!

And we might show a larger picture, in which a greater multitude would be represented, out of every condition and people, once sick with worse diseases than even leprosy, burdened with worse sorrows than disease—outcasts, some of them, and by their side others from homes of wealth, but with souls no less defiled, yet now cleansed and purified and saved. It is that picture which John paints of the great multitude whom no man can number, clothed in white robes, with palms in the hand, but whose garments are white because dyed in blood, and who sing "Salvation unto our God and to the Lamb." Such a picture illustrates our text: "As many as touched Him were made perfectly whole."

How so, you say, when even those who have found Him in the Word, and in the Sacraments, and in

Prayer, are still conscious of sin? We answer, Because their guilt is washed away by His blood; their sins are forgiven them for His sake; the robe they wear is His righteousness, not their own, and the palms they wave are for His triumph, not for theirs. Instantaneous and everlasting has been His gift of eternal life; and already the poison of sin has been abstracted, the root of evil has been removed; already the pure life is dominating over the impure, and the resistance of sin to goodness in the heart is becoming feeble; the leprosy is dying away, and soon, yea soon, in that heavenly kingdom there will not be a trace of its former presence. But because the cure is in this sense gradual, it is none the less true that in the other sense it is instantaneous and complete. Christ transforms life to a man. He opens a new world. He fills the heart with spiritual power. He wakens new thoughts, new loves, new desires. The old man falls off, a new creature in all essential principles takes its place. This is conversion; this is regeneration; this is the new creation; these are the moments in which we find God and draw near to the Source of life; and this whole result comes simply from the fact that by honest desire and faith our souls have touched Jesus, the Son of God!

I call on you, who are His people, to keep yourselves near this Christ, and again and again renew your strength by touching His omnipotent person.

And I call on you, who are yet sin-sick, who are yet unhealed—I call on you, as these Galileans must have called on their sick friends on that famous day, to come, and come quickly; come, put yourself in the way; come, reach out your trembling hand. For, as the multitude said to Bartimæus, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by! You need all that He has to give; why, oh why, tarry till you have found and touched and been healed by the Son of God?



## V

### BEHOLD YOUR GOD

"O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain ; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength ; lift *it* up, be not afraid ; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God !" — ISAIAH xl. 9.

WE should do great injustice to the Old Testament prophets if we regarded them merely as predictors of future events. To us, indeed, who are chiefly concerned with later events, and who find in their prediction evidence of the truth of both prediction and fulfilment, this element naturally assumes an important place in our view of the prophets. But from the prophets' own point of view this was a secondary part of their work. Their mission was primarily to the men of their own day. They were raised up by God to proclaim to the various generations of Israel the eternal law of righteousness ; the reality and authority of God ; the certainty of judgment and award ; the gracious purpose of God with Israel. They were preachers, political and social reformers, religious statesmen. Each one of them deserves to be studied by himself, that his peculiar personality may appear, framed in the particular circumstances



of Israel in his day. Such a study will result in a gallery of portraits than which none more instructive and various can be found in all the museum of history.

Of course, treating of such subjects, the prophets continually pointed Israel to the future; and, being inspired of God, they gave utterance to not a few specific and marvellous predictions. But these will be valued aright only when the immediate purposes of prophecy are put in the foreground. He who would read the prophets of the Old Testament should not be on the watch for wonderful predictions, but should rather lay hold on the moral and religious ideas which those mighty men of God enunciated to the men of their own age, and through them to us; and because of which their faces were ever looking toward that which was to come.

These remarks are preeminently true of the prophet Isaiah. No man, indeed, was ever transported further into the future than was he. None perceived more clearly both the immediate and the remote consequences of the course in which events were running. No man ever more certainly saw through the veil of futurity that he might describe, sometimes in singular detail, the events beyond it. No inspired writer has more perfectly met the spiritual needs of the generations that have followed him. And yet not on them and their needs, but on those of the living Israel

around him, were Isaiah's thoughts fixed. Over the sins of his age he lamented. Against the unbelief of Ahaz he directed his rebukes. With Hezekiah he guided the reformation which that prince effected. His object was to call the people back at once to God; to remedy the moral evils of his day; to revive the faith of Israel in Jehovah's covenant and promise.

It was for this that he directed the eyes of the faithful to that sublime hope of the nation unto which, as he reassured them, in spite of suffering and even by means of suffering, the servant of God should attain. Savonarola, thundering against the immoralities of Florence and rebuking alike the Medici and the pope, was not more a preacher to his day than Isaiah under Ahaz was to his. Luther, guiding the Protestant reformation under the protection of the Elector of Saxony, was not more concerned with the immediate issues of the hour than was Isaiah under King Hezekiah. Therefore, we shall best understand Isaiah if we regard him as thus bearing to a degenerate nation and a fainting church the message of divine righteousness. We are to conceive of him as a man whose mind was full of the thought of God.

One day there had come to him a vision of Jehovah in the temple, seated on His throne, ministered unto by seraphim, who cried, with veiled faces, Holy, Holy, Holy! On that day a live coal from the altar of Jehovah had seemed to be laid upon the prophet's lips,

that thenceforth he might utter burning words. He became from that moment a herald of God. Against all sin he declared God's anger; against all doubt he declared God's promise; against all danger he declared God's faithfulness; against all foes he declared God's power. This was the substance of his message. This was the burden of his soul. He was made a revealer of God to men. The people were prone to worship idols. Isaiah proclaimed that there is one only God. The court was prone to make alliances with pagan powers, to tremble before pagan armies, and to truckle to pagan compliments. Isaiah proclaimed that the only hope for Israel lay in God. This single but comprehensive truth seems, I say, to have been the burden of Isaiah's thought; from it he drew his predictions, whether of salvation or of punishment. The character of God was his only stronghold; the being of God the foundation of truth and of Israel; and, therefore, when, in view of coming calamities, he sought to uphold the faith of the loyal remnant of the people, our text was again the substance of all his message. It was designed to comfort and to stimulate. It echoed the old word on which Abraham had fed, and David, too: "O thou that bringest good tidings to Zion," he cried, "O thou that bringest good tidings to Jerusalem: lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid." This is the source of all consolation, of all hope, of all spiritual life. "Say unto the cities

of Judah, Behold your God!" To Isaiah's mind that was the all-sufficient word.

And so, I think, it should seem to our minds. This is the all-complete, the all-sufficient word. This is, after all, the simple object of the Bible. The Bible is not merely a revelation from God; it is also and more especially a revelation of God. Have you so thought of it? It is the unveiling of the hidden deity. It is the showing to us what God is. From this will follow what we are to do. But the object of the Bible is not to anticipate the future and not to answer curious questions. It is to reveal God, that we may go back to Him, and love and trust and revere Him. Its message is emphatically just this of Isaiah—Behold your God! Let me try to make you feel what this language suggests.

And I should like first to ask if this simple message is not one which men greatly need to have nakedly presented to them? Is it not true that to most men God is not a felt reality? There are few, indeed, who would openly express unbelief in God. Blank atheism is very uncommon. But the more refined agnosticism, which is so often in these days expressed, would seem to testify that many people have the feeblest possible sense of God's reality. To many men of the world He is a dogma of which they seldom seriously think; or a tradition which they do not disown, but the truth of which they seldom realize.

He is a reserved belief, perhaps, which they keep in a dark corner of their mind and seldom look at—an assumed but neglected fact—an occasional cause of fear. But He is not a living reality. He does not affect their conduct as their next neighbors do. He does not encourage and restrain them as even their casual acquaintances do. In no fair sense is He realized; still less is His friendship cultivated. How few there are who actually share the sentiments about God uttered by prophets and apostles and saints! How few of all these needy multitudes can say, "God is our refuge and strength!" How few of all our dependent, dying humanity can feel, "In Him we live and move and have our being!" How few can sing,

"My God, my life, my love,  
To thee, to thee, I call,  
I cannot live if thou remove,  
For thou art all in all."

This is a poor blind world: and the reality of all realities, how few there are who feel!

Yet is it not true that this loving sense of God, as we may call it, is the specific difference between a really good and a really bad life? Try to analyze the characters of men and discover the precise thing which radically separates between the good and the evil. It is not that some are moral and others immoral; for men may be moral and yet have thoroughly worldly and irreligious minds. It is not that some are sinless

and others sinful, for no one can be found perfectly pure. It is not that the good hold to one creed and the bad to another; for men may hold to a good creed but not live up to it. What shall we say is the difference between them—if we look behind actions to motives; if we take into consideration the inner as well as the outer life? Is it not this, that the good think of God, and try to please Him, and cultivate His fellowship and mourn over whatever grieves Him? Is not this the root-fact of moral character? The wicked are those who have not God in their thoughts; who do not willingly draw near to Him. Goodness, on the contrary, is godliness. The good man is the one to whom God has been practically revealed—in whom God has become a power for righteousness; whose sense of God is acute and constant. Like Enoch, he “walks with God.” Like David, he meditates upon God. Like John, he loves Him.

For I beg you to consider that this sense of God is not obtained by an exercise of the intellect. It is a moral sense, like the sense of right and wrong; and therefore it affects a man’s whole life and character. The human mind can, I believe, logically prove the existence of God; but who in the world was ever led to live a godly life by such a proof? The intellect can likewise prove, I believe, that there is a fundamental difference between right and wrong; but who was ever led to do right by such argumentation? It is the

sense of right itself which constrains to the doing of it. One man will have a sensitive conscience and another will not, and therefore one will obey and the other disobey. And so, to see God requires a spiritual awakening.

How it comes, the human mind hardly knows. The Bible tells us that it is the work of the Holy Spirit. There comes to a man more or less of this sense of God. God reveals Himself to His child. We are not told that the intellectually strong but that the pure in heart shall see God. The conscience is quickened. The heart becomes appreciative of goodness and purity. The finite soul feels itself in the hands of the Infinite. The child realizes his Father's unseen presence. It is a complex feeling, but it is chiefly a moral, not an intellectual, fact. And therefore this sense of God determines the whole of life. Because of it a man will strive to live for what God approves. It will affect his thinking and his acting, his inner and his outer life. He is not yet sinless by any means, but he is in a fair way to become so. The root of holiness has been planted. He has found God, and that is the real difference between the good and the bad; that is the beginning of heaven and of holiness and of peace.

If this be so, then what the Bible calls eternal life may be entered upon even here and while we are still on earth. This we should infer from what the Bible

says. "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." Let a man come to know God, let him enter into this divine friendship of which I have spoken, and he already has eternal life. Jesus said, "Whosoever heareth my words and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life"; not shall have it hereafter, but has it now; in the very fact of believing, eternal life has already begun. I want you to feel that you may and must have this living sense of God here on earth; that you may carry it with you not as a shadowy terror, but as your sweetest, dearest treasure; and that if you have it, then you have found life. For around it all that is good and noble and pure will gather, as the verdure of the oasis gathers round a living spring.

What is our need, then, but to behold God—to feel His presence, to admire His beauty, to enjoy His friendship, to obey His will? I tell you, this is the secret of life. Perhaps you think merely of escaping punishment. Believe me, if that be all that moves you, you are as far from happiness as ever. You think, perhaps, to be moral but not religious. Believe me, morality, great as it is, will not meet the deepest needs of your immortal spirits. You think, it may be, of even less laudable helps. You think that philosophy will support you, or human love bless you, or churchly rites sanctify you. But no! Soul



of man, your need is deeper; the secret of life is still undiscovered by you; you need God! You need to realize Him—you need to love Him! This is the great law of spiritual life; for this the Bible has been given; for this the Saviour died; for this the Spirit is working. Let us face the whole truth and be satisfied with nothing less. I am not asking any great spiritual attainment. I am not pleading for anything fantastic or unnatural. This is the most practical, most fundamental of facts. Eternal life for the human soul is, and can be, found only in life with God. And therefore the old prophet, in his short, simple exhortation, gives the plainest and most direct of Gospels when he cries to men in their manifest and bitter needs, "Behold your God!"

But if so, then let us look directly at the revelation of Himself which God has made to us through the Bible, or, rather, of which the Bible is the depository, in order that we may be able to perceive more distinctly the object to which the prophet points us. Isaiah bade the people to look to their God—to look away from their trials and perils, away from their sins and fears, to that Jehovah who had entered into everlasting covenant with Israel. The prophet knew that that revelation would appear most comforting, most inspiring, and that with their God in sight their courage would revive. Soldiers, fainting on the battle-field before the enemy's assault, look at the stained,

torn banner of their country, and re-form their ranks and return afresh to the onset. Poor sick men and women, terrified by the seeming approach of death, look at the hopeful face and calm confidence of their physician and already are made better. Ship-wrecked mariners, on the very verge of hopelessness, catch sight of a distant sail and gather up their powers for a little longer fight for life. These are illustrations of what the thought of God, the revelation of God to the individual soul, may do. For the Bible stands beside fainting, tempted, weary, dying humanity with these words of cheer, "Behold your God!"

Now I do not profess to be able to tell you all that God is. The Bible itself, I suppose, does not tell all that God is. It records the revelation of Himself which He has made to us. But what glories are still unrevealed we know not: what majesty mortal vision could not bear; what treasures human hearts could not yet value; what beauties flash upon the eyes of the angels and the glorified—this has not been told. We may assume that as there are stars not yet discovered by our telescopes, and mysteries of force that have not yet been revealed by science, so there are splendors and beauties of Deity which the human mind has never yet conceived. Nor can I even hope to describe now all that God has revealed Himself to be. For this you must study the Scriptures by the aid of strong faith and in the light of earnest prayer.

You will find that what the Bible calls "the fullness of God" is marvellous. Most of us take in but fragments of His revelation—side gleams and fitful flashes of His glory. Most of us are so deeply impressed with some features of His character as to forget others. You know that there has been no more fruitful source of error than just this. Men take part of truth and consider it the whole. They take partial views of God and deduce from these their whole theology. Against this we must always strive by seeking from the written word itself clearer and broader views, until, in the experience of the Christian life, we are filled, as Paul says, with all the fullness of God.

Let me only point you to some aspects of the divine character which seem to be specially important for us to behold.

I would say, for one thing, behold the watchful interest of your God in the lives of all His children. He has so revealed Himself, and the fact is wonderful. This we may call God's moral nearness to each one of us. You know, of course, that He is physically near to all. God is omnipresent. We think of Him, perhaps, as living in heaven and with penetrating eye surveying the universe. But that is a partial view. Let us remember that He is everywhere, in all the vast extent of this universe, to which no bounds have yet been found; and in each spot present in all the

fullness of His infinite power. But your God is not only thus near you in space—He is near you in heart. This is an even grander thought. He is near as Father. He is concerned in every event of life, cognizant of every thought, controlling every circumstance, tenderly watchful of every movement of your soul. As a mother bends over her child, observes every motion, cares for every need, so the infinite God does with each of His human children.

Did He not reveal Himself thus from the beginning? Behold your God walking in paradise with Adam; speaking in stern rebuke to Cain; communing as a friend with Enoch; journeying to Canaan and in Canaan with Abraham; making Jacob's stony pillow soft at Bethel; with Joseph in Egypt; on Horeb with Moses; inhabiting a tent among the tribes of Israel; speaking through the prophets; at last, incarnate in Jesus Christ—so runs the record of revelation. Is it not all a fuller and ever fuller expression of one idea—that God is with us; that in Him we live and move and have our being; that He knows our frame; and that His watchful interest never ceases and His hand is never wanting to protect and guide?

This, I say, is God as He has revealed Himself. Behold Him! He is by your side. Were the veil of sense drawn aside, you would see Him; you would see His smile; you would be moved by His grief over your sin; you would be startled by His frown; you

would cast yourself upon His breast. What solemnity, what carefulness, what joy, what purity, what hope should not this overshadowing of the wings of the Almighty cause? To every sinful, fearful heart, how should the message ring, with mingled notes of warning and of encouragement, Behold—behold your God!

But we say further, behold the faithfulness of God. We know that God is unchangeable. We cannot conceive of Him as increasing or diminishing in any of His attributes. From everlasting to everlasting He is God. But I beg you to observe that He has revealed Himself not merely as unchangeable in nature, but as faithful in heart and action. Faithfulness is the moral side of unchangeability, and it is the most precious side. Relatively speaking, the laws of nature are unchangeable. They govern everywhere. They have existed from the beginning of creation, and yet they waken no emotion, they bring no comfort to our hearts. Humanly speaking, the mountains are unchangeable. Their gray cliffs face the storms of centuries, and their huge masses remain apparently the same, while the scenes of human life pass and fade away. And yet they do but image and suggest a source of help which they themselves cannot afford. They are as cold as they are motionless; they are as heartless as they are hard. But God has revealed Himself as faithful; and here is brought to view strength and love combined. For faithfulness

is being true, and God is true to His nature, true to His word, true to His promises, true to His children.

How plainly the Bible record exhibits God's faithfulness. It shows the original purpose, with which man was made, carried out in spite of sin, even at the cost of redemption. It shows the promise to the woman fulfilled in the victory of Christ with which the Apocalypse closes. It is the record of the resistless, onward-moving plan, which God had formed in the beginning, faithfully executed in spite of man's failure—faithfully performed in spite of every hindrance. Yes, He is a faithful God; and therefore we may trust Him to the uttermost. To every one who is despondent, His word comes. To every one who hesitates to serve Him because of a sense of weakness or a fear of failure, His word comes. To every one who is disposed to doubt human progress and the world's conversion, or to stand aghast at the seeming delays of Providence, or to tremble at the approach of death, His word comes, Behold your God! Turn away from the changes of life and behold Him, the same forever. Turn from the petty conflicts of men and behold His hand, which is outstretched to control them. Turn from delays and reverses as they appear to us, and behold His unaltered purpose which runs through them. Behold your God and doubt not; and fear not. Heaven and earth may pass away, but His word never.

And so turn finally to the climax of God's revelation of Himself and behold His redeeming love. I need not remind you that this is the aspect most peculiar to the revelation of God which the Bible records. We know that He is righteous and holy, for He has so revealed Himself in our consciences. But we should never have known His redeeming love except through an actual redemption. And as we study the record of God's revelation, this love stands conspicuously out. It is whispered in the first promise; it is manifest in the later covenant with Abraham and with Israel. It is proclaimed by the prophets: "I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Redeemer." It is foretold by the rites of the temple, and it actually did redeem us at Calvary.

And so it has come to pass that if you would know God you must look for Him in the most unlikely place. The prophet cries unto men in their distress, "Behold your God," and lo! to what a spectacle he points us. For there must be a brighter manifestation of God made than that which nature contains, though the heavens with their starry host and rolling sun and mighty laws declare His glory and the firmament shows His handiwork. There has been a revelation made of the Infinite more wonderful than that which burst upon the eyes of trembling Israel when the mountain shook with His footsteps and its crest flamed with the fires of His unapproachable presence. What is it? When

was it made? Surely in some most seraphic form, by some tremendous act of omnipotence. Did the heaven roll back its curtains, that to mortal gaze there might appear the King upon His eternal throne? Nay, look! there is a rabble gathered round three crosses. On the middle one a Jewish peasant is transfixed. He is dying of fever and of thirst and of a broken heart. The mob are shaking their fists at his helpless form, and laughing at his agony. Then they leave him to his fate, and, under a darkened sky, surrounded by a few friends and a few soldiers, the crucified Jew expires with a loud cry. Who was he? Humanity, listen! The voices of angels, the voices of prophets, the voices of apostles, now at last the voices of many millions, answer, Behold your God! Here He has laid bare His heart of hearts. Here He has revealed Himself most fully. God is love. He is redeeming love. He has died in the person of His Son to save the lost. This indeed is the climax of the revelation of God.

“Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
And shut its glories in,  
When God, the mighty maker, died  
For man, the creature's, sin.”

Look, ye sinners, ye needy mortals, ye sin-cursed and perishing—look, behold your God! Pilate brought Him out before the multitude, crowned with thorns and robed in mocking purple, and said, “Behold the man.” But we bring Him forth crowned with the ap-



probation of His Father, robed in the vestments of heaven. We bring Him forth crucified, and say with the prophet, "Behold your God!" If this be God, then sin has found its cure; then death has lost its sting; then the curse has been removed; then whosoever will may have everlasting life. And He is God. The resurrection proved it beyond all possibility of doubt. And because He is God you may have access unto the Father, and may live forever, being reconciled through Christ. God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Much more, then, being now justified by His blood we shall be saved from wrath through Him. The crucified Christ completes the revelation of God.

And so we press home on your thought to-day these words of Isaiah, with all their fuller meaning, Behold your God! Through the revelation of Himself which He has made you may enter into life with Him, you may find Him now, you may discover the secret of peace and holiness. By Him God will come into your lives if you will let Him. Thus you may conquer every spiritual foe. You may walk with Him like Enoch, and work for Him like Paul, and love Him like John: only keep your gaze fixed upon Him. In every hour of temptation and of trial, in times of despondency, in the common work of life, amid the dust of the highway, in the quiet of your home, look unto Him. Behold your God! Let Him nerve you,

let Him inspire you, let Him hold you up. Live as seeing Him who is invisible. Keep your sight fixed upon the Father revealed in Jesus. Live and die with Him for your dearest thought, and when you pass from earth you shall see, as now you cannot; you shall hear the guardian angels that bear your soul into the light of heaven cry to you at last, Behold Him—Behold your God! His name is Immanuel—God with us. His cross is our banner, and He Himself is our shield and our great reward.

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## VI

### THE KEEPER OF ISRAEL

“Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.”—  
PSALM cxxi. 4.

To realize the presence and activity of God is one of the greatest delights of a spiritual mind. To such a man God is not an object of fear, but the cause of peace and the ground of hope. The more vivid the sense of His being becomes, the more joyous does life appear, the more beautiful is nature, the more promising is the future. Without God, life is an unexplained enigma; no sufficient reason for it can be found, no guide to its mysteries, no clue to its meaning. Nor has a cold, formal belief in Him any value for practical purposes. He must be felt in order to satisfy; He must be realized by a willing and loving heart in order that He may still the turmoil of the mind by the power of His manifested love. When He is thus realized, it is as though an everlasting rock had been revealed beneath our feet; as though the day had broken after a weary, restless night; as though a lost and frightened wanderer had found a friend. Then may the mind contemplate His infinite attributes with awful joy, and, conscious at last that it

lives, moves and has its being in Him, draw both holiness and comfort from every one of the qualities which He possesses.

It was for such a mood that this Psalm and this text were framed. In the lofty citadel of Mount Zion the Psalmist saw in thought the never-sleeping, ever-active Jehovah. His power was exercised throughout all nature and in the least event of Providence. He guided sun and moon in their courses, and He preserved in safety the humblest of His people. With intense delight did this believer, who seems to have felt greatly the need of divine protection, turn this thought over in his mind. Whether he scanned the firmament with its countless stars, or the perils of pestilence and famine upon earth; or whether he considered the moral dangers to which he was exposed on every hand and the ease with which his feeble feet might slip in life's uncertain pilgrimage; he was consoled by the knowledge that He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

What a contrast between this sense of God and the cold, unmoving thoughts of Him which most men have! Is it not the fact that to most He seems asleep? They cannot recognize Him in the world of nature, which seems to them to grind out results like a huge and blind machine. The only idea which they have of a manifestation of God is something which interrupts the usual course of events or

forces the existence of a supernatural cause upon their eyes and ears. And when this does not occur, the round of work and play goes forward and God fades from their thoughts. If they pray, they feel like Baal's priests, who, in Elijah's satire, had to waken their deity from slumber or recall him from a journey. Their fancy has placed Him in the heavens, far beyond the level of human life, like the gods of Epicurus, who feasted in serene enjoyment in the heavenly regions without care for earthly matters. Under the influence of such ideas religion dwindles to insignificant proportions. It loses its eye for the invisible. It becomes the cry of the deserted Hagar in the wilderness. And while there may be retained a formal faith in Deity, the march of man along his weary road must go on without Him until, perchance, in some better world, the soul shall return to Him who made it.

Not such is the Bible idea of a living God; not such was the Hebrew, not such is our Christian, faith. We hold that He is not far from any one of us; and our support in every danger of body and of mind is this: "Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." Let me inquire with you if this confidence be well founded. Is the text true, and how? Let me help you to realize the ceaseless activity of God and the comfort and confidence which this truth should create.

Every consideration, whether drawn from reason or

from Scripture, should keep us from thinking of God as separated from the world. Some men, feeling that there must have been an uncaused cause to account for the existence of the universe, admit that God must be. But, having assumed His existence at the beginning, they have no further use for Him and insist that the world, having been created, has since the creation run its course without divine assistance. Back in the darkness of the past they see a single moment in which God was active. This, of course, involves the belief that He still exists. But for all that they can see He has been sleeping ever since He spoke the word which called creation into being. The world, they think, is running itself. God is not in it. He is somewhere outside of and remote from it. He has not interfered with the operation of the mechanical laws which He imposed on it at the start. All that has come to pass in nature and human life has been due to the working of those forces which were inherent, though latent, in them from the first.

It is obvious that such a view could not permit expressions like these of the Psalmist. It would not allow us to speak of God as "keeping" any one. He could not be our "help." We could not suppose Him to be preserving our going out and our coming in. We should have to call on medical science and political economy and human friendship and beseech them to preserve us from all

evil. Indeed, the whole Christian system is a protest against the idea of a distant God. That idea has no place in it for Christianity; no place for an incarnation or an atonement. Christianity insists that God will dwell with man; that He has "pitched His tent" among us; that, like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him; and that He is most intimately concerned in guiding the process of man's history to an intended issue. To think of God, therefore, as having merely created the world and left it to itself, is to deny the revelation of Himself which God has made. Besides, the theory is unreasonable. If there be a God at all, He must amount to more than this. It would be unworthy of the attributes which we suppose Him to possess. The notion is, in fact, but a mere cover for unbelief in God: nothing but an unwilling confession that the reason itself cannot avoid admitting His being, even when it wishes to do away with Him.

There are others who go further, under the pressure of irresistible facts, and think of God as not merely the creator of the world, but as the watchful observer of its progress, and as interfering now and then when matters have gone wrong, to set them right. Still He is conceived of as separated from His creation. It runs its way for the most part without Him. He is simply watching it from above, as an inventor might watch an instrument which he has constructed. At



times he puts forth his hand and adjusts the machinery. He is like the superintendent of a factory : he does not run the machinery nor kindle the fires nor move the crank ; but, when a difficulty occurs and the machinery gets out of order, he is summoned to set it in order ; and when he thinks the time has come for it, he does away with the old instruments and forges new and better. So God, it is thought, at times has interfered to adjust the machinery of life and, on one great occasion, to set up new machinery ; but for the rest of the time He merely watches it turn out its product.

This view, you see, has a place in it for Christianity. According to it, God is not seemingly asleep, and it might be possible for a man to speak of Him as his keeper. But it does not admit that He is always active, and therefore we insist that the theory is incomplete and insufficient. It still leaves man and the world for the greater part of the time separated from God. God becomes simply man's last resource. It teaches him to turn to God when everything else has failed, with a belief in the possibility that God may help him. Yet only some great occasion, some dire necessity, will induce such a God to interfere. He will not always be thrusting His hand into His creation. We cannot expect Him to do it for every one of his countless creatures in the petty trials of their little lives. For the greater part of human life He is practically asleep : at least He is quiescent,

even though awake. And, therefore, the greater part of life is separated from Him and He from it.

Certainly, such an idea of God is utterly unscriptural. The Bible speaks of Him as the One in whom we live and move and have our being. Not a sparrow falls to the ground, said Christ, without your Father. He doeth His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth. It is not possible to escape from God. We abide under the shadow of the Almighty. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" said the Lord; and the apostle answered, "He is not far from any one of us."

What, then, shall we say, and how are we to think of God? We are to think of Him as upholding, by the constant exercise of His will, the very being of the world; as being in it as well as above it; as operating through its laws and forces at all times and in all places; never once letting it go beyond His control; never once allowing it to be independent of Him; incessantly sustaining and guiding the processes of its life. He is above and behind and in it. On His volition its existence hangs. He is not separated from it or limited by it, but He is ever manifesting Himself through it. We may illustrate this by the relation of the mind to the body. The mind is greater than the

body; the body changes its elements and finally perishes, but the mind remains immortally the same. Yet the mind dwells in the body, works through it, and is reached by it. Or we may illustrate it by an idea which has taken possession of an entire people and is moulding their actions, though the latter are intelligent and free. Both illustrations are partial—nothing can fully illustrate God: He is beyond all analogy. But only by thus thinking of Him can we understand the language of Scripture and give to Him His place as both the supreme governor and the fundamental life of all existence.

On this view, observe the ceaseless activity of God. The regularity of nature, for example, is as much the result of His activity as any miracle can be. We observe that events in the material world take place in relation to one another according to a certain ordered succession of principles, which within the scope of our experience are invariable; and these principles we call the laws of nature. But why should we infer that they are self-sustaining? Why should we not conclude, since so many arguments convince us that there is a God, that these principles are the methods according to which He has determined to have nature work, and by which He works in nature, in order that human life may be stable, human knowledge advance, and the human mind learn the thoughts and will of its Master? And if at certain times for the purpose of teaching us

exceptional truth, He has seen fit to work according to another principle, different from that by which He usually works, and has produced what we call a miracle, in what respect has He been more active in His miraculous than in His customary mode and rule of working? He is as active in the daily sunlight as when around the cross of Calvary the noonday sun was quenched. He is as active in the storm and wind as when, on the Sea of Galilee, His Son bade storm and wind to cease. He is as active in supporting the laws by which we get from the soil our daily food, as when He caused the manna to fall from heaven. He is as active in maintaining the daily life of man as when Christ brought back the dead Lazarus to consciousness. It is an utter mistake to allow our belief in those exceptional events which we call miracles, and in which we certainly ought to believe, to blind us to the fact of God's unsleeping vigilance in the support of that creation which derives its stability from His unchanging will, and which, in a true sense, may be called, as Goethe called it in a false sense, "the life garment of Deity."

Thus what we call the Providence of God is most real; and it does not in the least conflict with the observed laws by which our circumstances are affected. Every human being finds himself in a network of forces with which he has to deal in order to live, and from dependence upon which he cannot escape. He must

learn how to live in view of these circumstances, for he cannot disregard them. He must use food, and must discover what food is wholesome and what is not. If he expose himself to contagion, he will take disease. If he fall over a precipice, he will be crushed. Only by observing and obeying the laws of nature can his physical life continue. Then, too, he is liable to misfortunes and calamities over which he has no control and which seem to happen wholly without regard to his deserts or moral character. A railroad accident is as likely to kill a good man as a bad one, and pestilence will strike its poison into the veins of the saint as easily as into those of the sinner.

In view of these facts not a few ridicule the idea of Providence, and declare that no particular care is exerted by God over the fortunes of His creatures. So far as their present lives are concerned He is practically asleep. But is not this a superficial view? As I have said, the laws of life are but the expression of His abiding will—the rules which He has appointed and employs in order that man may be educated and trained. For Him continually to break these rules would be to make our moral progress impossible, and to keep us forever helpless children instead of building us up into intelligent and useful men. Yet He is touching us and dealing with us as truly when He thus governs, as though we felt on our own hand the pressure of His. If He refuses to exempt us from

calamity, it does not follow that He is not watchful of us or is unmindful of our condition. He deems it better that we should suffer than that the laws which He has established should be broken. But this by no means proves that He is not keeping us in His thought.

Our own experience shows that the laws and forces of the external world can be so manipulated by their Ruler that, without breaking any one of them, specific purposes can be accomplished by them. One law offsets another, one force modifies another, so that whereas any one by itself would destroy us, the whole taken together maintain our lives. As the earth is held in its orbit by two opposite forces, the one of which would bury it in the molten sun and the other would fling it into frigid space; so in countless ways do we depend for our very existence upon the interaction of established forces. And if a finite mind can use the forces of nature, combining them with one another and setting off one against another, so as to construct an ocean steamer or a telegraph, it does not seem unreasonable to believe that One with an infinite mind can hold in His hand the laws which He has made, and can so combine them as, without violating one, to accomplish an equally specific end.

But be it never forgotten that the object of Providence is far more than the mere preservation of physical life. Its prime end is moral training, and into that training the duties and the calamities of life enter

as a most necessary part. God may be caring most tenderly for one whom He allows to suffer. He may be smoothing the brow hot with fever that He has allowed to burn. We dare not estimate His providence by mere temporal and physical good and ill; these have their place in it, but they are only parts co-operant to a greater end. Though we be poor and needy, though we be overwhelmed with misfortune and sorrow, He may be thinking of us and causing all things to work together for our good. The moment, therefore, that we learn to think of physical laws as constantly sustained by His will; of their interplay as in accordance with His purpose; of their movement as the manifestation of His thought; it is quite possible to believe in Providence and yet to recognize the system under which we are placed. The more intricate that system, the more complex the network of circumstances, the more marvellous are its disclosures of the sleepless activity of God.

Therefore we insist that He is ever active. He never slumbers, He never sleeps. Instead of nature being a self-evolving machine it is quivering with the thought and vitalized by the presence of Deity. It is not mere poetry to say, with David, that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth His handiwork; or, with Wordsworth, that—

“To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.”

God is not only nature's original creator, but its present master—the power back of it and revealed in it; and instead of human life being the haphazard result of weak will and growing reason battling against iron-like and blind nature, it is a history of intended progress wrought out under the superintendence of a never absent God—a God who is great enough to control the whole vast drama, yet so great as to keep in constant thought each one of the millions of His creatures. We live and move in Him. His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men. We are at all times immediately present to His thought. He does not have to come down from heaven to help us. He is here already. He does not have to stop the machinery of life to care for us. He is working in that machinery already. His will is sleepless. His knowledge, His righteousness, His love are sleepless. He ever lives—He ever works. And as the thought grows upon the mind, how unspeakably solemn and hopeful, how awful and joyful, does life become, known as it is to be ever passed under His open eye, in His almighty hand.

The thought of the text is that this ever-active, ever-sleepless God is particularly engaged in caring for His trustful people. It is He that keepeth Israel. The Lord is thy keeper. He is thy shade upon thy right hand. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil. He shall preserve thy soul. There is



a wonderful richness of suggestion in the many times that the keeping of His people by God is mentioned in the Scripture. He said to Jacob, "I am with thee to keep thee in all places whither thou goest"; and we feel quite sure that if God had not kept him, Jacob would have fallen a victim to his own sinful heart. He said to Moses for Israel, "I send an angel before thee to keep thee by the way and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared." And how He fulfilled that promise to the wandering, rebellious tribes every reader of their history knows. But the Psalms especially abound in this phrase: "Keep me as the apple of the eye" (xvii. 8); "Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins" (xix. 13); "My mercy," said Jehovah, "will I keep for him forevermore" (lxxxix. 28). So Isaiah says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." Jeremiah cries in pathetic appeal for the people to repent: "He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock" (xxxi. 10). While our blessed Lord Himself prayed for His disciples, "Keep them from the evil" (John xvii. 15). All these passages, and many more which I might quote, suggest the breadth and depth of the meaning of our text: "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

Notice, it is Israel whom He keeps. It is true that His tender mercies are over all His works, and that His government and providence extend over all

creation and all intelligent minds. But the specific object of His solicitude is Israel, and by that term we are, of course, to understand the multitude of those who trust and love Him. It is to be used in no narrow sense. It is not to be identified with any particular nation or any particular communion; but all those who turn from sin and seek His face, all those who enter into personal relations of faith and love with Him, are to be accounted the special objects of His sleepless vigilance. There is encouragement in this for the Church. She shall not fail in the long war with sin and error. Particular churches may change and pass away, but the Church herself shall prosper to the end. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against her. She shall be disciplined and tried, purified and taught, but also extended and enlarged until she embraces in her fold all nations. For if God exist and be governing the world, and if He be a God of holiness and of love, it is inconceivable that He should guide the world to any other issue than the victory of truth and the defeat of error. As we work and pray in the cause of our Lord we may be inspired by the knowledge that the truth is not in our keeping and the cause is not dependent on our power, but that God is with it and will keep it safe.

But we may apply the text more specifically to individual believers; and how sweet to be assured that each one who trusts Him will discover its truth.

He will keep His people in their every-day lives. Mark how the Psalmist describes it: "He shall not suffer thy foot to be moved." In this slippery, perilous journey the words promise what every self-distrusting Christian feels the need of. He shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in. The least matters are not beyond His reach. Many admit that in the great moral issues of life He is concerned, but hesitate to believe that He takes note of trifles. But trifles make up the great issues, as the sand does the seashore or the drops the ocean. Amid these He has promised to lead us, making the way in which we should go plain, providing those things which He thinks best for bodily comfort and household delight. He does not promise wealth, or fame, or greatness. But He will keep us: we shall not fall if we obey Him. And it is worth noting that when we have tested the matter it is found that just in the common matters of life do we discover the most signal instances of God's faithful care. Here, where anxieties are often so heavy, may we roll the burden of them off on Him who careth for us. Here, where the better life is so often crushed by needless loads and smothered by a heavy atmosphere of worldly worry, is the place for us to believe in God's sleepless vigilance and give to the winds all fears and doubts.

But He will do more: He keeps His people from all evil. How dare we say it, when sorrow is

the portion of every cup; when temptation is the lot of every life; when death is waiting to engulf us all? How dare we say it? Why, easily enough. If we trust and follow Him, He will not let sin obtain a hold upon us. He is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory. He will not let sorrow be an evil, but will make of it a good: for though for the present it seemeth to be grievous, yet afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. He will not let temptation overcome us, but with it will provide a way of escape that we may be able to bear it. And when death comes, it will be found to have no terrors, but to be a welcome into life. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me. He does not say that He will keep from suffering and from sorrow and from temptation and from death. He will preserve from all evil: and we shall find that these are not evils, for He has transformed them into blessings. He shall preserve thy soul.

Finally, He will keep His people to the end. Did not Jesus say, "They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." When He prayed, "Keep them from the evil," did He not add, "I will that they may be with me where I am"? Oh, how helpless we are in this mighty world of force! One blow of its great hammers and we are dead. And

not more helpless in this respect than in respect to greater things: helpless to deliver ourselves from sin; helpless with even the keenest thought to pierce into the mystery of life or the veiled hereafter; helpless to attain the ideal which, like a summer sunset, shines above the hard pathway of present experience. Surely we need God. And as we realize His sleepless activity around us and above and beneath us; as on closer inspection the world is found to be but the place where He would dwell with us, how blessed to be told that He will be our keeper, our protector, our helper, our friend, even forevermore!

I ask you to put yourselves into the keeping of this God. He comes to you in Jesus. Are you not already convinced of your unspeakable need? He will keep that which you commit to Him. Then commit your souls to Him. Learn to trust Him. Learn to pray to Him and to follow Him. Then fear not, fear not—not the world, not sin, not doubt, nor your own feebleness. He will keep you; and the eternal vigil of Him on whose living will the world reposes, and for whom nothing is too great to do, or too small to be beyond His notice, will be your guarantee that you shall reach the goal. Will you not trust Him? Will you not commit yourself to Jesus Christ? Let this be your inspiration to do so: "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

## VII

### THE FATHER OF THE PRODIGAL

“But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”—LUKE xv. 20.

WE often study the parable of The Prodigal Son for the purpose of showing how faithfully and significantly Christ portrayed the life and fortunes of the sinner. But perhaps we do not so often use it for the purpose of studying in it Christ's representation of God. And yet this must have been the main object of the Saviour when He told this matchless story. It was far more important that He should disclose God to men than men to themselves. The latter disclosure is important and occupies no small place in the revelation of Christ. But soaring far beyond it in importance are the questions, What is God? How does He regard us? How may we regard Him? Christ's statement of the way of salvation turns, therefore, first of all on His revelation of the Father.

But besides this, the plan of His discourse on this particular occasion was to show to the Pharisees how wrong their views of God and of His disposition

toward men were. They had murmured at Him, the professed Messiah, for "receiving sinners and eating with them." This seemed to them abhorrent to the very idea of the holy Christ and righteous Jehovah. It was therefore for the express purpose of showing them what in reality was God's disposition toward the sinner that these parables were spoken.

He begins with that of the shepherd who has lost one sheep, and from compassion for the lost one, leaves the ninety and nine and goes after that which is gone astray. The Saviour specially brings out the shepherd's joy at the finding, and the way in which he summons his friends to share it with him. So, likewise, he adds, is there joy in heaven over one sinner that repents more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance. Then follows the parable of the woman who has lost a coin, and who, because of her sense of loss and of the value of the coin, searches diligently till she finds it. In this was taught God's valuation of the sinful soul; and this fact, no less than what was implied by her joy at finding the coin, was truly a new revelation of God to the men to whom Christ spoke. But man is more than a sheep or a coin—he is a son. And the Saviour dwelt at length on the third and greatest of these parables, that by His accurate description of man's wandering He might bring out still more fully God's marvellous love.

This, therefore, was the main purpose of the parable. The other figures are but to point to that of the Father. He is the one on whom we should chiefly fix our gaze. For the maxim, "Know thyself," must be but the portal of another, "Know thy God." The discovery of self would but bring torture and sorrow could we not add to it the discovery of God. And if any of us to-day feel that in any particular we are represented by either of these two sons, we may appreciate in very truth this delineation of God, who is the sunlight of the new world into which Jesus invites us. Let me call your attention, then, to the character of God portrayed in this parable. Notice, first and in general, its representation of Him as our natural and most affectionate Father. It is evident that in this word the representation of God in these three parables culminates. Tender as the relation between a shepherd and his flock often was, it was, of course, far below that of a father and a son. Much as the woman may have valued the coin which she had lost, she could not value it as a father would a child. These two former parables do but present pictures of what God is like: the third parable describes what He actually is. And it is so far above them in descriptive power that while Jesus briefly indicated a point or two of meaning in them, on this He dwells at length, that He may bring out fully the reality and patience of God's fatherhood. But not only did these



three parables culminate in the representation of the fatherhood of God; the fact is that this was the distinguishing feature in Christ's general portraiture of God; the feature most distinctive of His revelations; the feature which placed God in a new splendor before the world, which drew men unto Him with a confidence and love which had seldom been known before.

Men had felt before the majesty of God: so much so, indeed, that they had supposed it impossible for Him to stoop to the real care of His creatures. They had felt the holiness and righteousness of God: so much so that they deluged the earth with the blood of sacrifices slain to appease His anger. The intellect had felt its way to the apprehension of a Great First Cause—of an Infinite Absolute Being, the source of all things, and perhaps the substance of all. Yea, men had felt feebly the love of God. But it was a doubtful and cold affection, or else it was so placed by the side of His holiness that the two seemed to issue from different beings or at least not to fall equally upon all. God might love the Jew, but He hated the Gentile. He might love the good, but He hated the bad.

There was thus wanting a view of God in which all that was holy and majestic was conserved, while at the same time He was perceived as lovable and near. Christ supplied it in saying to men everywhere, in their sin and shame, "God is your Father." When we consider its meaning, how marvellous are the suggestions

of this term! What hopes it raises! What confidence it creates! What reality it gives to the idea of the Most High! It means that God is like us—a person, intelligent, moral—because we are like Him. It means that He is in a peculiar sense the Author of our being. It means that He is our provider, our educator, and the one to whom we owe loving obedience. It means, above all, that He loves man and that with no cold or sentimental affection, but in such wise as, only more perfectly than, a father on earth loves his child—that He loves men just because they are His children, in spite of their waywardness and follies and disobedience, so that no being in the universe grieves more over their sorrows or their sins than He against whom their sins are committed. This, therefore, is the crowning feature of Christ's representation of God.

It is true that men had oftentimes before Christ came called God their Father. The phrase is found in nearly all ancient religions. It was not the word which Christ introduced, but the full idea of the word. Men had used it as a term of dignity; Christ taught them to use it also in its natural force of love. I quote from Dr. Storrs' lectures on the *Divine Origin of Christianity* the remark that the term Father as applied to God among pagan peoples "did not in the least imply affectionate paternity. It represented supremacy only; it was applied by poets to those whom they honored; by slaves and clients to master and patron. But

Christianity shows the fatherhood of God in His spirit of love as well as in His authorship of finite intelligences, extending to all who are born of His life and becoming intense toward those who seek moral fellowship with Him. To them He gives gifts which the mind of the world had wholly failed to attribute to Him or to conceive possible until it was exalted and instructed by Jesus."

It is true, also, that God is represented in the Bible as in a peculiar sense the Father specifically of His believing people. And it is equally true that there are other representations of God in the Scriptures which we must not allow to fall out of mind. But it is this general representation of God as man's real, near, watchful, holy, approachable, glorious Father which we need first to learn. It exalts man; it quickens philanthropy; it glorifies His righteousness: and, as it is finally revealed in the sacrifice of His eternal Son for us, it wakens, as nothing else can be conceived to do, responsive love and ready faith and joyous hope in sinful hearts. This is the fundamental truth taught in our parable; and only with it as a background can we appreciate the particular features which Christ proceeds to add in His description of our Divine Parent.

The first feature brought out in Christ's description of the Divine Father's character is perhaps in appearance rather negative and unmarked, but none the less important. Christ represents, you observe,

this father as allowing his son, when at last he was of age, to choose and act for himself. He divided his living between the two brothers. In this is indicated very clearly God's refusal to force his son to act against his will. He allows man to wander from Him. No doubt the father of the parable foresaw the probable consequences of his younger son's determination. He perceived his willfulness. He feared its results. But, nevertheless, he allowed him to leave the paternal roof and work out his own destiny. He was a free agent. He was a responsible being. He must learn by experience what he would not learn, perhaps, from his father's lips.

Here, then, Christ represents to us God's recognition of man's freedom and responsibility: and the fact is an important one for us to notice. Connected with the view of God as our Father, the thought becomes natural and finds additional force. This paternal government of God's is not merely the authority of law; the father is not exactly a king, though the children owe him as much obedience as if he were. But he does not desire merely to rule. He is not so anxious about the mere maintenance of his authority. He desires rather to cultivate the personal life of his son, to bring out the powers that are in him—to make, as we say, a man of him; to throw him in some measure on himself, and to make him feel his own freedom and responsibility.

I think that this conception of God as our Father helps to explain not only what He does for us, but also what He lets us do for ourselves. The father is fundamentally a trainer, an educator, if he realizes his position; and the training will be accomplished not by mere restraint and exercise of authority, for so the soul of the son would be but clothed with the raiment, as it were, of virtue. The plan is to bring out the sinner's own life. This requires love and patience and the recognition of freedom, as well as instruction and authority; and it appears to me that the reality of God's Fatherhood is most appropriately, though incidentally, shown when, in answer to this son's demand for independence, we are told that he "divided unto them his living." He did not send him forth empty. He was ready to bestow his own livelihood that his child might have the chance of making use of it. He was not so anxious to keep his own power and authority as to recognize the necessity of the son's working out for himself his life and destiny.

But be that as it may, God's recognition of man's freedom and responsibility is a fact. It is shown in ways precisely similar to what is exhibited in this parable. Here are the children of God on earth, sinful and rebellious. Here they are trying to solve for themselves the problems of life and duty—seemingly thrown on their own resources; compelled to discover, often by a bitter experience, the miseries

of sin and the rewards of righteousness. What is the meaning of this seemingly independent life of men, with its awful perils and mistakes, its many falls and sorrows, its slow, toilsome learning of the truth? Does it mean that God does not care for men? Not by any means, for He has revealed to them His will in a most stupendous way. Does it mean that God could not help man's fall—that He had not power to keep His child at home? Surely that cannot be. It evidently means that He has chosen to throw on man's shoulders, in some sense, the burden of his own destiny: He has bidden him use his freedom; He has permitted him, much as the result grieves Him, to wander and rebel, that so the human race might discover through its own experience its need of God; might render Him in the end a willing service; might be won by God's love and by the truth itself, rather than manufactured without its own will into what pleased God.

You see that this throws at least some light on dark problems, and brings out most vividly the character of the divine Father. It suggests a reason why He conceals Himself from physical sight; why He gives so large occasion for doubt, and hence for thought and searching after Him; why even in His revelation of Himself in His Son he took an unlikely form; why, in short, He does not constrain belief and force obedience. Man is a free agent, a responsible being; he is to work out through his own life the decision of truth and duty,

that in the end, if so be he attain to it, he may stand before his Father with a sympathy and an appreciation and a sense of truth and holiness which he could not have had save by finding them out for himself.

Be it remembered that this does not imply that the Father leaves His children without watch or care; that He gives them no help and guides them by no paternal power. That, in its turn, would be as unfatherly as its opposite. It is purposely to guide and educate: while He would throw us on our own responsibility, He also stands near, though unseen, to assist us if we call upon Him. But He certainly does recognize our freedom and our individual obligations, and the necessity that our attainment and conclusions should be really our own work, as well as His gift. And thereby He lays on every child the responsibility of acting out the life, if he would enjoy the privileges, of a child of God.

Hence, notice again, the father's patient, though no doubt anxious, waiting for his younger son's return. The parable follows the course of the prodigal. It depicts in a few strong phrases his downward career; his waste of the father's gifts; his poverty; his misery; his final degradation. Then it relates his bitter self-discovery. He comes to himself, and in that far country he remembers the happy and plenteous life of his early home. At last he is penitent, and he resolves to confess his failure and humbly to take his

place as a servant in the house where once he was a master. How thrilling is this description! In every phrase we see a mirror reflecting some phase of life about us—perhaps of our own. But meanwhile, what of the father? The silence of the parable about him is, I conceive, as suggestive as its description of the son. He is waiting. Do you think he has forgotten his absent son? His subsequent conduct proves that he has not. He is looking for his return all the while. He is waiting until the foolish experience of sin shall have been finished, all the while yearning for the empty place to be filled, hearing perhaps reports of his son's shame and sin, but patiently expecting the time of his return.

Now it should be carefully remembered that while this representation of God is true, it is not all the truth. It puts before us that attitude in which we see the Father, in which He seems to us; although elsewhere in Scripture we are distinctly taught that the Father does not wait for the sinner to return, but goes out into the far country to seek and to call. But there are many things in the divine action of which we may not be aware. There is an unconscious side to life. We are told by the apostle to work out our salvation, knowing all the while that God is working in us. We know that He is working in us, but we are not conscious of it. And so with this prodigal in his shame. He came to himself, we are told. But was



that all? Do you think there was no inaudible voice in his ear—no unknown influence moving on his heart? Most certainly there was. Unknown to him, the father was with him; that new impulse and resolution were the father's call, his returning strength was the father's spirit, and the ultimate fact was that before he had taken one step toward the old paternal roof he had been taken in the arms of his father and was being borne home. Still, I say, he knew it not, and the object of the parable is to set forth that which appears to the consciousness of men. So far as any outward manifestation is concerned, God waits. So far as they can see or are aware, He is far from them and they are far from Him. He conceals Himself. He lets them go their way. But no matter how far they may have wandered or how low they may have sunk, He is watching, He is waiting, for their return.

I am very sure that no representation of God can be better news than this to a sinning world. God has not disinherited His wayward sons. He has not decreed that they should not return. He has not forbidden the wanderer's name to be mentioned, or declared that He will not be reconciled. He does not have to be reconciled at all, so far as His heart is concerned. He is simply waiting. Oh, the forbearance of God! Think how slow the race has been in coming to itself, how impious have been its blasphemies, how

shameful its sins, how black its rebellion! God is no name, or shadow, or heartless law. He is a person; He is a Father; and do you not think that He must feel unutterable sorrow over the persistent self-exile and ruin of these millions of His sons? And yet no thought has He of repelling them; and when we do come to ourselves, methinks our sharpest pang must be in the thought that we have trespassed on His patient long-suffering through so many, many wasted, ungrateful years.

And now we are brought to the culminating glory in Christ's description of the Father as seen in His reception of the sinner. As I remarked at the beginning, this was the main object of our Lord in the parable. Men had murmured at His receiving sinners: He would show how the Father receives them. Men had sneered at Him for eating with the unclean: He would show how the Father welcomes such to His festal board. Here the description of the father becomes more animated. Waiting and watching as he was, he does not even have to be told of his son's return. Has he not all the while been calling him? Did he not see the first impulse to return when it sprang into the mind of the prodigal? Has he not been watching him all the way? Men perhaps knew not whither that ragged outcast was journeying; why his look was so eager and at the same time so sad; why he gazed so shamefacedly at his tattered gar-

ments. And men may likewise not know on what great end the soul of another is bent—the mystery of his conviction of sin and his heavenward look they may not appreciate, or, if any do, they may predict that such as he will never be received. But not so the father. He saw and welcomed the prodigal before he was yet in sight, and when he was a great way off he saw him and lo!—mark you, scoffing Pharisee, mark you, trembling, doubting sinner—lo! he ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. Hearer, remember that Jesus is illustrating God to us! There is something almost daring in this description: were it not a revelation it would be almost impious to imagine God thus portrayed! The Infinite and Holy thus falling on the neck of an outcast! What boldness of thought! What audacity of description! Yet, I submit, that no one has ever come out of the ruin of sin and has sought, through Christ, the injured Face, but he has experienced that which justifies Christ's language and which makes this scene of the parable mighty enough, through its revelation of love, fairly to change the world!

And so mark the cordial welcome home. God commands us to repent and to confess our sins, and the prodigal did so. But God's purpose in so requiring is not to mortify us by upbraiding; for when our sins are confessed He remembers them no more. He does not, according to this parable, speak one word of

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reproach, much as that was deserved and might have been expected. Instead of this He proceeds to make His child fit for His dwelling-place, and to adorn him in a manner becoming His son. What if the poor prodigal had waited until he could have made a presentable appearance? Many a sinner does so and finds himself, after years of waiting, as unpresentable as ever. Fortunately for him, this prodigal came home just as he was, asking only to be taken as a servant, to be saved from his self-destruction, and the father made him fit. "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." This is God's welcome to the sinner.

The words make us instantly think of the robe of righteousness—the seamless, matchless robe of Christ in which God will clothe the penitent—the ring by which He will seal the soul's eternal marriage with Jesus Christ—the preparation of the Gospel of Peace with which his feet will be shod. The description means that God will perfectly restore us to our place in His home as He has also had us in His heart. He will declare that for Christ's sake we are justified. He will declare that our sins and our iniquities shall be remembered no more. He will confer upon us all the privileges of the sons of God. Always sons by nature, He will make us sons by redemption and holiness. We shall be received into the family and entitled to all the privileges as if we never had sinned against Him.

And what is the reason of this divine love and joy? The Pharisees could not understand it, and in the elder brother, who likewise felt no such rejoicing, they are pictured. He was angry at the favor shown to the returning outcast, and he remonstrated, dwelling on the sins of the prodigal—his wasted fortunes, his shameful life. He would not have received him; or, at the most, would have given him a servant's place. But mark the father's answer: "This my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." The word express God's valuation of a soul. Not merely as the shepherd loved his lost sheep, nor as the woman valued her lost coin, but with the love of a father to a child—part of his own being—does God regard the sinner. To Him sin loses us, we are lost to Him, we are dead to Him. It is not merely that we are without Him, but that He is without us. That was the source of this father's joy in the welcome, and it is the source of God's. He knows the value of our souls. He knows how bottomless is the pit of ruin into which we are almost ready to fall. He knows what life is. And He, it would seem, feels in a sense incomplete; the family circle seems broken and wanting so long as we are away.

So God's word is throbbing with this strange, unutterable love, and by it I am justified in trying to tell you to-day how even the Most High longs for fellowship with you. Is it not strange? Who would have dared to have said it but Christ? Can we enrich God?

Can we add to His felicity? No, no; and yet, yes; since, having begotten us, He wants our love; having made us for Himself, He longs for our presence. Oh, men may well stand amazed at Christ's revelation of the Father! No abstruse proof, no cold, majestic, philosophic conception. It is no empty name. He has made God the sun in our sky, the center of our souls. He has presented Him, personal, near, loving, patient, long-suffering. He was always such: but Christ has shown Him to us more plainly, and we have only to listen to Christ to know as never could have been known otherwise, the marvellous, unlimited, yea, passionate love of God! Surely none of you can face this picture unmoved! Surely no prodigal here, no elder brother either, can gaze with heart unmelted! He calls you, sinner; He is waiting, the robe is ready: will you come—will you come? Oh, with such a God, who would choose ungodliness? With such a Father, who would choose exile from home? This picture of Christ is the vivid portraiture of what Saint Paul meant when he was ready almost to lay himself at the sinner's feet and say, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." Behold thy waiting Father, son of God! Come, arise to-day; come home!



## VIII

### WORKING OUT SALVATION

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *His* good pleasure.”—PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.

I THINK that we are sometimes misled in our interpretation of this familiar text by attaching an incorrect notion to its two opening words. To a hasty reader they imply that the safety of the soul can never be attained until the end of life. They may even seem to some to contradict the idea of salvation through faith, of immediate salvation on the ground of Christ's merits, which is the common teaching both of Paul and of the other apostles. They appear to throw back on our feeble shoulders the burden of our own redemption; and while they add the encouragement of God's cooperation with us, they yet seem to leave out of sight the complete salvation of the soul in Jesus Christ. Not a few, I imagine, have hastily cited these words as somewhat inconsistent with the doctrine of justification by faith.

But the difficulty arises simply from a misunderstanding of the words “work out”; and perhaps I can best express the wrong and the right view by an



illustration. Let us suppose a slave offered his liberty on condition that he accomplish a certain amount of work. This will illustrate the mistaken view of our text. The slave is to work out his freedom. He may have encouragements. His master may even give him assistance. But his freedom is to be the reward of his own exertions. He will pay for it by his own toil. He will work it out in the sense of securing it as the wages of years of labor. If this were the sense in which we are to work out our salvation, it would be obvious that we have a hard task upon our hands, and that if ever we gain freedom we shall have good reason to compliment ourselves.

But let us suppose the case of a slave emancipated by his master, given his full liberty at once ; and then directed, both for the sake of gratitude to his liberator and for the sake of his own self-development, to prove himself worthy of freedom. He, too, is now to work out his liberty : but not in the sense of procuring it, but in the sense of bringing out that which is in it, of using it well, of applying himself so as to enjoy his new privileges. He is to prove himself really free by manifesting self-control ; by securing employment and culture ; by making his own the blessings and the prerogatives of freedom. Legally free, he is to work out a freeman's life, that he may manifest to others and himself enjoy both the rights and the duties which pertain to his new condition.

This latter case will illustrate, I believe, the sense in which we are to work out our salvation. We may have it at once by faith in Christ Jesus. No one teaches this more plainly than Paul. Jesus secured our needed emancipation. We are free from condemnation. We have passed from death unto life. We are no more the possession of Satan, but the accepted children of God. We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son, and our first need is to realize, in all its wonderful meaning, the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free. Having this possession, we are to work it out to its consummation. Having it legally, we are to work it out practically. Having it in the germ, we are to work out in our lives all its tendencies and consequences.

And this is to be an individual matter. Each one is to work out his salvation for himself. Each one stands in an individual relation to Christ. Each one has individually believed and individually lives. And so, individually, we are to weave into the fabric of our own lives, as that grows with the years, the pattern which God has given us; we are each to work it out, as the skilled workman may work out in wood or metal the idea which lies already fully formed within his mind. We are not to work for life, but, as it were, from life, as being those who already have it and who are resolved, by divine grace, to experience all that life implies. Just as God Himself works out in the history of crea-

tion His primeval thought, that thought which before the first creative word was uttered already embraced in itself every moment of history, and every atom of existence, so are we in the sphere of Christ Jesus, in whom potentially we have all things, to work Christ out with fear and trembling into the actual being, thought and character of our souls.

With this understanding of the text, let us take, in turn, the chief elements of which our salvation consists and consider how they are to be worked out to their proper results.

First, our salvation consists in the enlightenment of our minds by the saving truths of the Gospel, and therefore we are to work these truths into the actual fabric of our lives. A man becomes a Christian in part through the personal apprehension of certain practical truths. Those truths are old in that they have been known in the world from the beginning of Christian history; they have been formulated into dogmas and creeds; they have been expressed in the hymns and prayers of the Church of all ages; they have become the familiar commonplaces of religion. Yet to each man they are new, in that, in becoming himself a Christian, he feels their force for the first time. To him it is as if they had just been revealed. They are practically a new discovery to him. They have power over his mind. They have a vital meaning for the first time. It has been said that genius is shown by

making fresh what is familiar. Some of the greatest discoveries of science have consisted in the perception of what really lay in the commonest and best known facts. Truth is all about us: and the discoverer or the poet but catches a glance, through facts with which all are familiar, into the realm of ideas and forces which have always existed in the facts, but which ordinary eyes have not seen. So the believer is a discoverer; and the new light which he now perceives for the first time is practically to him a revelation.

What these saving truths are I need not rehearse. They are not many. They are all closely connected with each other. They are so related that when the mind has felt one, it must needs feel the others also. Foremost of them is the reality of God; His personal presence; His authority and His power; His righteousness and His holiness. Closely united with this there is the sense of man's sin—of his alienation from God—and, therefore, his need of repentance and pardon. Now these two truths merge in the perception of what in reality Christ is, what He signifies in the history of mankind: that God has manifested Himself in the person of Christ and that we may have redemption through Christ's name. This is to human minds as the light of the sun. It carries with it a thrilling perception of what God is and what we are: that faith is our duty, love our life, and heaven our hope. God

has shined into our hearts to bring the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Certainly, although this perception of Christ is enough to alter a man's whole view of life, the truth is very imperfectly apprehended by him. Even so, how little he knows of God! How little he understands of the cross itself! He must feel that this Sun which has risen upon him with healing in its wings is yet full of mystery. Of its past history and of its present nature he knows scarcely anything, while beyond the circle in which it moves and from which its beams fall upon him the vast unmeasured distances of space assure him that secrets of which he knows nothing but the fact of their existence await further illumination. Only he knows that he has enough light to walk and work and live by. He must feel as I suppose one would feel who has discovered some mechanical principle which solves for him a knotty problem by which he has been vexed, but the further application and the innermost meanings of which are as yet unsolved.

Nevertheless, he is enlightened, and now, yielding with joy to the discovery he has made, he is impelled to work out to all its legitimate consequences the saving truth of the Gospel. It will never do to stop. Truth is realized only when it is embodied and worked out in some material. As a theory it is but a cloud driven by the winds. The cloud must descend and enter into the structure of the

world, and the truth must enter into living expression. And the natural material which such truths as these of the Gospel seek is the human soul. In its life truth is to become, as it were, incarnate. Take any political theory as an illustration. You know that it is realized only by being worked out in the fortunes of a people. Only so can its real worth appear. Only so can the truth and the error in it be separated. Only so can its mission be fulfilled. Otherwise it will evaporate and disappear. Or take any scientific truth. You know that it is discovered as a fact in actual operation. The object of science is to ascertain what is working in the natural world, and this is but another way of ascertaining how the Creator is working out the principles which He impressed upon the world.

I was deeply impressed by an anecdote once related by Dr. Archibald Alexander Hodge, of that distinguished scientist, Professor Joseph Henry. As a young man Dr. Hodge was Professor Henry's assistant in making his experiments. He says: "I can well remember the wonderful care with which he arranged all his principal experiments. Then often, when the testing moment came, that holy as well as great philosopher would raise his hand in adoring reverence and call upon me to uncover my head and worship in silence. 'Because,' he said, 'God is here: I am about to ask God a question.'" Surely, that was the right spirit of scientific inquiry—none the less exact for being

religious—and it went upon the idea that God is working out in nature His own thought and plan. So, I say, truth is to be embodied—worked out into the material of our lives: and the Christian, being once enlightened, is to work out his salvation with fear and trembling.

I could take each of the revealed truths of the Gospel and show, in part at least, how it is to be thus wrought out. Take, for example, the truth of the Incarnation. It is not to be regarded as a mere mystery without moral bearing upon our lives. It was the culmination in Scripture history of the truth which had been formerly taught to Enoch when he walked with God, and afterward to Israel by tabernacle and temple in which Jehovah dwelt. It reveals the possibility, I mean, of the indwelling of God in and among men. Worked out by the believer, it results in a sense of divine nearness and likeness which make the whole world radiant with divine presence. It results in the sense of God in us—Christ in you, the hope of glory, our bodies the temples of God by the Spirit: and thus, in the growing consciousness of union and communion on earth with the Father and the Son. I, too, am a son of God, and this carries with it a view of privilege and duty, of inheritance and possession, of expanding life and eternal glory before which the mind fails as the eye before the sunbeams, and can but wait for time to unfold the unspeakable reality.

This must suffice as an example. You may take each truth of the Gospel and similarly work out its logic in your life. It will not be bare logic, but living experience, growing knowledge. God means His word thus to be wrought into His new creation; therefore, perhaps, it was that He revealed Himself not as an abstract truth, but as a life, the Word made flesh—that as out of nature the student gathers part of God's thought, so out of Christ he might gather more. Thus as the student reapplies what he has discovered, so are we to reapply in our lives what we discern from Christ's. God does not wish His truth to return to Him as it came forth, any more than the farmer when he sows his seed wishes to pick up the seed again as he cast it down. What he looks for is the harvest—the product of the seed which he has sown as it has been worked through the processes of nature. So God desires His word to return to Him not in propositions and theories, but in living souls—informed, pervaded, illuminated, recreated, by the truth they have received. And if we have been enlightened by these saving truths of the Gospel, this is in order that the fabric of the new creation may arise in us made according to the pattern shown in the mount. We are now and henceforth to work out this salvation in our thoughts and feelings and actions, even to the very last result. Thus shall we approach unto the perfect man—the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.



But let us take another view of our salvation. It consists not only in the enlightenment of the mind by saving truth, but in the fact which is thereby revealed of sin actually forgiven, of justification for Christ's sake before the Father, of acceptance in the Beloved: and this reconciliation with God we are to work out into its ultimate aim of perfect holiness.

No candid student of Scripture can doubt that it teaches the doctrine that the sinner is freely justified and acquitted by God from all his guilt as soon as he believes in the Lord Jesus. God does not put us on probation when we come to His Son. He treats us as the father of the prodigal did his penitent boy. He acknowledges us as His sons, and forthwith reinstates us in our place in His house. Therefore Christ said to the penitent woman and to the believing paralytic, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." Therefore He cried to all His hearers, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Therefore Paul wrote in the spirit of Christ: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," and quoted to the same effect the old prophet's words, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." We believe, therefore, in immediate justification. God accepts the penitent sinner as righteous for Christ's sake. He imputes to him the righteousness of Christ.

He declares him legally guiltless. God is reconciled to the sinner and the sinner is reconciled to God. The believer is a free man. Before God's law he is an innocent man. His sins and his iniquities are remembered no more. He is reconciled in Christ to God. At the foot of the cross the burden rolls off.

Now, perhaps, this is precisely what most of you understand by salvation. It is salvation; but in one very important sense it is incomplete: and hence the difficulty which men so often find in it. Not a few people actually regard this doctrine as injurious. They say, for example, that it teaches men so to rely on the work of another as to do no work themselves; that it affords also an easy excuse by which men can imagine themselves saved while they continue living in sin. It is said, further, that this doctrine is a mere legal fiction, such as we cannot suppose God to act upon, however men may do so. He must treat men as they are: and to accept as righteous for the sake of another those whom He knows to be unrighteous would be to bring His government into merited contempt. Hence the sheltering robe of Christ's merits is sought to be dragged from our shoulders, much as the elder brother would have torn from the prodigal the "best robe" which his father had put upon him: and we should all be left in our shame and sinfulness to stand the poor chance we should have at the hand of eternal righteousness.

It will help to remove such objections from your minds and may lead you to give no ground for such objections to others, if you will mark the bearing of our text on this view of our salvation. There is no doubt, as I have said, that the Bible teaches immediate justification for Christ's sake. But it is important to add that the Bible insists with equal force that the salvation which is made legally ours we are to work out; the liberty which has been declared to be ours we are to exercise both as to its privileges and its duties; the acquittal which we have received we are to make a real and personal deliverance from the actual bondage of sin. It is only on the supposition that the formal will thus become the real that it is permitted. It is only on the supposition and certainty of our becoming like Christ that we are allowed to know that in Christ we are saved.

In this, as in the former point, an illustration may make clear the force of our text. In Drummond's well-known book on *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, one of the most interesting chapters is that upon "Environment." This is the modern word for circumstances. It means the sum total of the outward conditions in which any object lives. The influence of an animal's environment upon it is now recognized as one of the great complex forces in its development. If it adjust itself to its environment it will live. Harmony with environment is the condi-

tion of life, and the higher the environment, the higher the life. If it be removed to another environment, it will often, if it have sufficient vitality, come to adjust itself thereto so as quite to change its habits. This is a well-known fact in nature and, as Drummond points out, we find the same fact in moral and spiritual matters. A man is made by his company. If he would improve, he must put himself in a better environment. Yea, his effort should be to put himself into the best of all environments, of which God Himself is the chief factor, that by adjusting himself thereto he may find in harmony with God the perfect life.

I think that the ingenious author might have carried his argument a step further. His book has been criticized because it contains no reference to atonement, and here, if anywhere, this might have been introduced. For when God reinstates us into His favor in Christ Jesus and accepts us as righteous for Christ's sake, this is but placing us in the most favorable circumstances for the growth of spiritual character. We are in Christ as the tender plant, which, sheltered in the conservatory from the winter's storm, produces even tropical fruit. So in Christ, with guilt removed, with favor shown, with hope beating high, we are so situated that, in spite of contending temptation, we may work out in our lives the actual image of the Saviour. We do not have to work against only

hostile influences. We are only in a state of imperfect adjustment. Already we have the faith, the love, the desire, and in Christ we become fashioned, as otherwise we could not do, into the likeness of our Lord. If you wish to reform and save a child whom you have discovered in a home of squalor and vice, you will not have much prospect of success if you shall merely give it good advice and offer to pay its schooling and furnish it with clothes, while leaving it in its squalid, vicious surroundings. No; if you wished to save such a child, you would feel that these would undo all your work. You would remove it beyond their influence. Perhaps you would take it to your own home. There you would have reasonable hope of its reformation. There it would be able to work out your benevolent intentions. The purity and cleanliness and religion of your home would gradually become natural to it. The old nature would be put off and a new nature put on, congruous to the new circumstances amid which you have placed the child.

Thus, as I conceive it, God does with the believer. He puts him, first of all, in such a new relation to Himself, that in it spiritual growth is possible. We could not be made holy without first being forgiven. We could not work out our salvation without having first received it as a free gift. But having so received it, we are to work it out. Like

emancipated slaves we are to prove ourselves worthy of liberty. Being declared freemen, we are to shake off our fetters. There is plenty of need of effort and toil. It is real work. God does not exempt us from such work. Only it is work with a reasonable prospect of success: and that is not true of the work of those who labor for their salvation with the law against them. We are to work our salvation out. We are to enter into a personal experience, ever more and more complete, of that union with God, that liberty from sin, that deliverance from evil, which already we have the moment we believe in Jesus, though we have not realized in experience its infinite blessings.

Such, then, I apprehend to be the meaning of this command. There are other points of view from which we might regard it, but these two that I have presented to you must suffice. Certainly they are sufficient to give ardor and hope to every earnest believer. The apostle does indeed say, "Work with fear and trembling." But no doubt he so spoke because he would have us realize the momentous nature of our task. We may well be filled with awe as we consider the privileges we enjoy, the trust committed to us, the magnificent goal which is held before us. And by fear and trembling I understand not slavish terror, not fear which springs from doubt, but the solemnity and carefulness which should spring from the sense of our divine sonship and our peerless

portion in Christ, which are to be worked out in this world and in the flesh. And that we may not faint, he does not fail to add also the reminder, "It is God which worketh in you both the willing and the doing according to His good pleasure." This phrase confirms our view of the text. We are to work as those in whom God already works and dwells; as those, therefore, whom He has already accepted, and whose purpose is to carry out His purpose; whose work is done because He is working; and who, therefore, again have the utmost encouragement to persevere.

Let us obey, therefore, my hearers, this most practical command. Consider the capital you have to start with, and then work out its utmost capacity, that the return may be larger, and a larger reinvestment follow. Already you are Christ's, I assume. Yours is the Sacrifice and the Advocate; yours is the citizenship on high; yours is the Holy Spirit; yours are the truth and the promises. Therefore your work is plain. Enjoy your liberty. Put sin under your feet. Apply the truth to every exigency of life. Follow in the footsteps of the Master. Solemnly, carefully, yet joyfully and hopefully, work out into life and character, into opinion and emotion and conduct, in short, into your whole being, the salvation which you have from Christ by faith; and you need not fear. He who worketh in you will enable you to succeed.

And if there be any poor soul here who is trying to

work out salvation for himself in the other sense, with no acceptance of a Saviour now,—working it out doubtfully, anxiously, and vainly, seeing how poor and faulty the result is,—let me point out to that soul its great error. Your anxiety, your toil, your readiness to work, my brother, are all right; but you are working in the wrong way and you never will succeed. You need to stop working for a while, to look at your worthless products, and then to Him for salvation—to the Lord, our Righteousness. He only can save you. He will put at once the robe on your shoulders and strength within your heart. He will give you what you cannot make for yourself, and then He will enable you to work as you never worked before; to work out in your life by His spirit the glorious salvation which He has purchased by His blood. Work not *to* Christ, but *for* Christ and *with* Christ, and you will have solved the problem—the working out of your own salvation.





## IX

### UNFINISHED BUILDINGS

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. . . . So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”—LUKE xiv., 28–30, 33.

WE naturally dislike failures. We hate to fail ourselves. Some men would rather do wrong than fail; so lofty is our pride and so sensitive are we to the criticism of the world. We look with some derision and contempt on the failures of others. Unfinished labors and disappointed ambitions are often thought fit subjects for scorn. Our Lord was quite true to life when He described the mockery which failures meet with. He Himself was to feel the scornful dart. Hanging on the cross, an apparent failure in the eyes of the exulting priests, He was to hear the cry: “He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross.”

More or less poignantly, we all feel the sting of such remarks: and yet are only too apt to make them. It

is true that often men are not to be blamed for their failures. Sometimes these cannot be helped. Sometimes, too, they are our best friends, though they meet us with grim visages and though their embrace be rough. But wherever we see presumptuous ambition falling from the too dizzy height to which it has climbed; or reckless extravagance ending in rapid bankruptcy; or any attempt, especially if we do not sympathize with it, evaporating into smoke; we quickly put upon it the stigma of our derision and say, not always kindly and yet not without reason, This man began to build and was not able to finish.

Against all such failures in religion and in Christian life our watchful Lord has warned us. His warning is needed: for it is not hard to begin a good work; and many start to run who never reach the goal. Does not the adage say that "The way to hell is paved with good intentions"? A little child may begin to dig away a mountain with a trowel or to empty the ocean with a cup; but he overrates his capacity and underrates the task. Equally thoughtless are those who set out on the moral and spiritual enterprises of life without preparation and an intelligent understanding of the work before them.

Not a few begin the religious life under such mistakes, and, of course, they fail. A little gush of enthusiasm thrills them as they listen to a vivid presentation of the truth; and on the spur of it they

enlist for a campaign, the dangers and duties of which they do not begin to comprehend. A wave of religious feeling spreads through the community, and men mistake the contagion of excitement for the vital force of conviction and real conversion. Conscience stings them for some particular offence, and in remorse they dedicate themselves to a service which they do not truly love. Misfortune falls upon them; bereavement enters their homes; death with stealthy tread draws near; and in sheer alarm they try to hide themselves under a profession which deceives no one except perhaps themselves. Cases like this frequently occur, and it is no wonder that they do not issue in permanent good results. Enthusiasm dies; feeling ebbs; conscience sleeps again; fortune smiles once more; sorrow's edge is dulled: and the episode passes, leaving the man worse than it found him.

I do not forget that there are others guilty of exactly the opposite fault, in that they wait too long and let the golden opportunities escape them which God meant them to improve. But other texts are meant for them. At present we deal with bad beginners. Perhaps there are more of these. Christ wants us to begin and to finish: and if we begin aright, we shall be sure to finish. Permanent success, completed lives, genuine, real disciples were what He sought to make: and knowing how easy it is for men to make mistakes and how melancholy a sight such

an unfinished building is, He warned us of our peril and showed us the secret of success.

Let me give you some examples of such unfinished buildings, which were meant to be, but are not, structures of Christian character; and point out the common causes of their failure.

Some men begin to build, but are not able to finish, because they do not lay a strong enough foundation. The foundation on which a man's personal religion rests is his faith. That is the root-principle out of which his Christian life expands and unfolds. That is the fundamental fact on which his experience of religious power depends. An irreligious man is one who does not trust. He may intellectually believe, but he does not personally confide in God. The change which makes him a Christian, if he ever becomes such, consists essentially in his learning to trust. He sees now the reasonableness of such trust: inasmuch as reason cannot show him salvation and God has given sufficient evidence for his trust to rest upon. He becomes so far a child again. He takes God at His word and humbly rests on it. Not that he as yet believes all that he ought to believe or will believe. Not that he is at once exempt from doubts and still less from sins. But he has found faith. Having found that, with it comes the religious view of life, and he becomes so far forth a religious man.

Yet this is only the foundation. On it is the struct-

ure of Christian knowledge and character to be raised. Out of it are the Christian virtues to grow: and if the faith be not genuine and strong, it may give way when much has been built upon it, and the whole edifice crumble to ruin. Have you ever considered how we build each day on the preceding day's assumptions, and go on building until the whole fabric of our habits and relations rests thereon? A man's first convictions are of awful importance to him. For when he has made them, he has thenceforth to assume them as proved. He has to build on them. He takes his position in the world on the strength of them. He acquires habits based upon them. He forms ties in which these convictions are assumed. Thus the structure rises on the foundation of his original belief.

What a frightful catastrophe is that which has sometimes taken place when, after years of such building, the underlying faith gives way! Men have been driven almost mad by the calamity. Some have been dishonest and have hidden the change of faith because of their unwillingness to face the consequences. The catastrophe is enough to frighten any one—to feel the very rock on which our whole lives rest sliding from underneath us; to see our fundamental axioms melting into fog, and to find ourselves reduced to the miserable alternative of either beginning life all over again on another basis or else patching up the old foundation by some more or less dishonest

means. It is of primary importance, therefore, that we take every possible means of acquiring a foundation faith which will be strong and true: such a faith as will stand the strain which will be put upon it, and successfully uphold throughout life whatever may be built over it.

What are the qualifications of such a faith?

It must not be a blind faith. A blind faith is one which exists without intelligent reasons; which does not know why it believes; which can give no account of itself to others. Many start with such a faith, and it is no wonder that by and by the crash comes. They believe merely because they have been taught to, without seriously thinking for themselves. They accept their faith on authority without ever examining the right of their authority to teach. They do not realize that their faith must stand the strain of later thought and of strange temptations. They don the uniform of belief without consideration of the fight which awaits a soldier's life. There are such things as both blind unbelief and blind faith: and the blunder of each is to be condemned. "Prove all things," says an apostle; "hold fast that which is good." Another apostle says, "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." He does not mean that we should be able to answer all objections and solve all difficulties, for, as Newman once wrote, "ten thousand difficulties do

not make one doubt." But he does mean that we should believe because we feel faith to be an intelligent and reasonable thing, and therefore should hold it not as if we were tied to it with a rope by another's hand, but as grasping it deliberately with our own hands.

Then it must be a faith not in man but in God. We do not urge men to believe in us, or in the Church, or even in the apostles, but in God as revealed in His Son Jesus Christ. Paul said to some who were putting him above his Master, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" To have for your foundation faith in anything human is to build on sand. For no man can be to a soul its God or its spiritual father. No belief in any man or church will of itself reconcile your sinful heart to the Holy One. Your trust must be in God Himself. It must be a resting upon His being and a dependence on His word. It must be the establishing in you of filial confidence in the divine Father, and this, through His only Son, the divine Saviour. Many a time has our faith in man received a shock; and some poor souls, who have been resting on human rather than on divine supports, have lost in the wreck not only their faith in men but their faith in God also. They were illogical, but they suffered loss, nevertheless; and the melancholy view of their lives warns us that only faith in God is a strong enough foundation for the structure that is to be built upon it.



Still further, your faith must be eager to know better Him in whom you have believed. Some men seem to think that when faith has once been exercised, its mission is done, and that henceforth they may be busy about all other kinds of knowledge and work except the knowledge of God and His work, and yet their faith retain its power. Is it any wonder if after a while their minds become cultivated in every respect except in spiritual things, and that little by little a great chasm is opened between their real life and the faith which they once held? Suppose you make a friend and "swear to him eternal friendship," and then go off and live by yourself, keep up no communication with him, do not share with him his thoughts nor let him share yours, become absorbed in things from which he is excluded: how long, do you suppose, will your friendship last? Go back to him and try to assume again the old relations, and you will find that he and you are separated by a want of sympathy which no formal association can recreate. So must your faith in God be of a kind which seeks to know Him better and better. It must expand with your growing life. It must be fitted into the changing circumstances of your fortunes. It must be a divine companionship in the actual warfare of this world. It must twine itself about God's heart as it feels His arms supporting your soul. So will it be living, real, practical, potent; and though you grow to be never

so wise, never so rich, never so busy, it will abide with you, and be the ever-sufficient foundation on which your life's building rests.

Then you will be able to build and to finish. Oh, some believers are afraid of doubt and infidelity! People speak of the decline of faith. Now and then we do see men who began to build but were not able to finish because their faith had failed them. But it need not have failed; and if it be as I have said it ought to be, we need not fear for others or for ourselves. A faith that is intelligent; that rests on God, not on man; and that ever seeks, amid the other avocations of life, to know God and to obey His truth better and better; will support the mightiest structure which the longest life and the most active brain and the busiest hand can build upon it.

But, again, some men begin to build but are not able to finish because they are unreasonably ambitious, attempt too much, and then give up in despair. The great cathedral at Cologne was begun as far back as the thirteenth century, and century after century it remained unfinished. It was too ambitious a structure for the age and place to complete. Not until about thirty years ago was it finished by an heroic effort of the Prussian king, and then only by a vast expenditure of money and of modern skill. There are many who try to build Gothic cathedrals when they ought to be content with chapels or dwelling-houses. Entering

on the Christian life, they have unreasonable ideas. They lay out more work than any mortal can accomplish, and expect results which even the divine promises do not warrant. Of course, their towers are never more than begun, like that of Babel; and with a disappointment as unreasonable as were their plans, they give up the task altogether and tell us, perhaps, that they have tried religion and have found it a failure.

Here are some illustrations of what I mean by these too ambitious plans.

One begins with the idea that he will understand everything. He is a philosopher, and he means to solve the problems of theology and of Providence that have vexed the ages. In most cases he is soon more interested in curious questions than he is in practical piety, and examines the stones so long that he forgets to build with them. His religion becomes a mental speculation. He becomes eccentric in his views, and after a while he breaks away from the faith and dedicates himself to his speculations.

Another begins with the idea that he will transform the world in a lifetime. He is sure that he can do what the apostles failed to do. He has some pet scheme by which humanity is to be immediately brought to its right condition. With great enthusiasm he sets forth—with more zeal than knowledge; and when he has broken his spear against the gigantic evils of the day, and has found himself unable to

conquer them, he rashly concludes that nothing can be done, and lays down his arms.

And still a third carries the same unreasonable ideas into his personal life. There have been those, as you know, and there still are those, who think to destroy the earthly life at once, and enter into perfection by casting off the human ties and sympathies which God had made for us, and in ascetic solitude attain perpetual communion with divinity.

There are those, too, who begin the Christian life with no conception of the patient work of sanctification which lies before them, and think to enjoy at once the ideal pleasures of a holy and sinless life. They are like the seed which Jesus described, which fell among thorns; and they are choked by the cares and riches, the temptations and the sorrows of life, and bring no fruit to perfection.

All these classes begin to build, but are not able to finish, because they plan unreasonably ambitious structures. We do not need to lay out such grand schemes. We shall only fail if we do. We were not meant to live in palaces but in ordinary dwelling-houses. It is not for us to attempt what even apostles and prophets thought beyond them.

For be it well understood that the Christian life does not offer us the explanation of all mysteries. It is not a philosophy, but a practical theory of life. It does not explain the principles of God, nor make us wise

like the Most High. We know but in part, and while sufficient light is given for the daily walk, the heights and depths are still veiled. We must be modest. It is not necessary to understand all things in order to get real happiness and usefulness out of life. Let us not try to build museums to exhibit curious discoveries in; nor palaces in which to display the achievements of our mental powers; but simple dwellings, in which we may live with God in faith and communion, and which will be quite sufficient for the little while we have to stay in them.

And be it well understood, also, that God does not call us to transform the world. He is reconciling the world unto Himself; and only subordinate parts are committed to us. Even the Lord Jesus was content to limit His work to the special lot assigned Him; and though there was much, doubtless, that He would have liked to do but could not, He did so well what He was given to do that He could say at the end, "It is finished." Only do with thy might what thy hands find to do, and leave the rest with God.

Then do not forget that the building up of personal character can likewise advance only slowly in this world. It is a life-long matter. Disappointments and trials and temptations are parts of the needed discipline. Concentrate, therefore, on what is practical. Start out to do your best for Christ and men, to know all that you can know, to fight the good fight till death; but

remember that at the most we can accomplish little. Still that little is worth doing and doing well. It is your heaven-given mission. Do it with your might. It will give point and issue to your Christianity, and at the end you will at least have finished something, and will not awaken derision and shame by an ambitious failure.

And now, still again, some begin to build but are not able to finish, because they try to do too many other things at the same time. They are like workmen who take too many jobs, and the particular trouble is that they often become more interested in the doing of other work than in the building up of Christian life and usefulness.

I suspect that this is one of the commonest reasons why so many in our day begin to build and are not able to finish. The temptations to forget the Lord's work are innumerable. The young man, for example, who has started well, becomes fascinated by the claims of business, desiring, as he does, to push it to success and fortune ; or he becomes absorbed in the study and the practice of his profession. When he gets a home of his own, he becomes chiefly interested in securing the comfort of his family, and in maintaining his place in the hardly contested race of life. Never, perhaps, did so many voices, sweet and deceptive as the siren's, call us in different ways. Culture calls us to her feet and wealth dazzles us

with its promises ; politics offers an easy path to fame ; and science tells of mysteries to be learned, more wonderful than alchemists ever dreamed of. So we neglect the building up of faith and of Christian character. We dwindle into religious indifference and external morality. We care for everything except that which is most important, and to which we once pledged our names. Is it any wonder if we present to God's eye an unfinished task, and never enjoy the comfort of a completed spiritual home ?

How shall we escape this peril ? Well may we ask the question. I reply, Only by close and constant watchfulness. The prophet Haggai lived after the return of Israel from Babylon, and reproved them for just this fault, that they built their own houses but let the Lord's house lie waste. He assured them that real prosperity would come to them only when they cared for Jehovah's temple even at the cost of neglecting other things. I bring a similar message to you. You must not let the work of life cause you to forget the duty of prayer and the service of Christ's kingdom. It is idle to say that you have not time. You have time. Besides, whose is your time ? What are you but workmen in the employ of God ? Is not your time His ? Then do His work. Do not scatter your energies. Put that first which belongs in the first place. Lay the emphasis of life aright. Seek first the kingdom of God. Build the temple, the temple

of Christian character, the temple of divine service. Give heed to these things, and do not prepare for your souls in your dying hour the horrible thought that you have been absorbed in the least important matter to the neglect of that for which you were chiefly sent into the world. When the Master comes to examine thy day's labor, and asks thee what hast thou built, it will not do to say, "See, Lord, I have been working on yonder house of my own, and have not had time to do much at thine." Surely He will say, "Did I not employ thee for *my* work? Go thy way. As thou hast served thyself and not me, look to thyself for thy reward."

And, finally, some men begin to build, but are not able to finish, because they do not count the cost beforehand. This was the reason of failure which our Lord had especially in mind. How fair He was with those disciples who knew so little of what was involved in the great undertaking! Some were ready to follow Jesus under the impulse of mere patriotism; others from the excitement of the popular enthusiasm which was so soon to die away; others, perhaps, even from selfish and sordid motives. The Lord desired to save them from such unhappy mistakes. He insisted, therefore, upon their knowing what the cost of discipleship would be, and He put the case so strongly that it almost staggers us as we read His words. "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother,



and wife and children, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

Of course, He meant "hate" only in a comparative sense. He told us to honor father and mother, to love wife and children, and our neighbor as ourselves. So He could not have meant us to hate them. But he did mean that our acceptance of Him as Master should be so complete and absolute that nothing will be allowed to stand in its way. Everything that becomes in any way inconsistent with it is to be surrendered. Then He added, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." He meant us to realize that the Christian life is one of self-denial; that we must not enter it expecting only reward but must expect also trial, and that we must enter as bearers of the cross. It is true that the cross becomes sweet when we bear it willingly; that His yoke is easy and His burden light. But He did not tell them that, because He wanted them to begin to build in the resolute spirit of self-sacrifice. Finally He added, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple"—forsaketh all, that is, in the sense of withdrawing from it our supreme allegiance; putting it with ourselves at the service of the Lord; being willing to spend all we have and are in the work to which God calls us. Thus Jesus taught us to count the cost. "Which of you," He says, "intending to

build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?"

I make my appeal to you, therefore, for an intelligent, sincere, hearty, and real acceptance of Jesus Christ. It would be easy for me to dilate upon the reasons why you should begin the building. If you do not feel them, you must be blind indeed. But I know you do feel them, for conscience impresses them upon you. But probably not a few are held back from beginning, just because of the fear that they may not be able to finish. They do not want to be failures. They do not want to be inconsistent. They are afraid to undertake so great a task as it seems to them. By all that I have said do I respect their desire to be honest and consistent. Unfinished buildings—monuments of folly! Certainly these no one wants.

But I press upon you the fact that if you set to work in the right way, there is not the least likelihood of failure. Lay the foundation by a simple, honest trust in Jesus as your Saviour. Be content to do the work which He assigns you. Do not let yourselves be carried away to the neglect of your religious duties. Be honest, be sincere, give yourselves wholly to Him, and then you need not fear. You may be poor and weak, but He will make up for all that. You may feel yourselves wholly inadequate, and you are so; but He will give you the grace you need day by

day. This is the testimony of all who have builded under Him, while those who will not begin simply ~~because~~ they are afraid they will not finish, will have no work at all to show Him when He comes to make inquiry of their souls.

Oh, the joy of him who begins in the faith and love of the Saviour, who daily builds a little, who, amid the other work of life, does not forget his soul and his Maker, who tries to extend Christ's kingdom, and thus in life and work builds up God's house! Even if his life be short, even if he have only a humble place assigned him, he will be able to greet his Lord, when the day is done, with the happy words: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

## X

### STRENGTH AND BEAUTY

“Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.”—PSALMS xcvi. 6.

I SUPPOSE that the Hebrew writer of these words was looking at or thinking of the temple, and that, as he admired its architectural strength and beauty, his thought was raised to adoration of Him whose dwelling-place the temple was. It is doubtful whether this Psalm was composed before or after the Babylonian exile—whether, therefore, the eye of the writer fell on the temple of Solomon or on that which was erected by the Jews who returned from Chaldea. But for our purpose this matters little. In either case the sanctuary of God filled him with admiration.

If, however, it was Solomon's temple of which he spoke, we can imagine some of the features which he must have had in mind. The immense blocks of stone of which the foundation was composed, and the great Lebanon cedars which were brought by Hiram, king of Tyre, explain the reference to the strength of the building. Though not large, it was a solid, massive structure, built to last through ages, while the foundations themselves rested on imperishable rock. And, then, the resources of art were exhausted to

make it beautiful as well as strong. The interior was overlaid with pure gold, on which were carved figures of cherubim and palm trees and flowers. All the utensils of worship were of the same costly metal and elaborately ornamented; while precious stones gleamed amid the gold and Tyrian tapestries hung on every side. The wealthiest of kings lavished his riches; the most skilled artificers taxed their art; the adventurous mariners laid tribute upon distant lands to make beautiful the temple of Jehovah. It thus seemed to combine the two elements of architectural perfection,—strength and beauty. The Hebrews beheld in it the fittest habitation for God which human hands could provide; and in its perfection as a building they saw represented the perfection which the human soul would enjoy when made in like manner the dwelling-place of God.

Hence the exultant strains of this Psalm. It calls upon the whole earth to worship the Lord, for He only is God. All are exhorted to come into His courts and offer Him their sacrifice of praise. As their Creator, they are bound to obey Him. As their King and Judge, they are in peril if they disobey Him. And the honor and majesty which are before Him, the strength and the beauty which are in His sanctuary, are at once the proof that He is worthy to be served, and a promise that in serving Him all men may find the highest and noblest life.

If I may be permitted to take an illustration of the text from what is just now in all our thoughts, I would point you to the massive and yet beautiful building which the citizens of this community are about to dedicate to the administration of justice.\* Our new court-house finely combines the two qualities of strength and beauty. It is almost as massive as if made by nature itself, while the outlines are so artistic; the proportion of parts is so harmonious; the ornamentation, while simple, so appropriate, that as we look upon it we think less of its strength than of its beauty. And yet I may hope that we do not merely admire it as an ornament to our city, but also rejoice in it as a fit symbol of the just and yet merciful laws to whose administration it is consecrated. It represents the supremacy of law in this Republic; our determination that law shall be enforced among us. Like the court-house, law is strong, and yet, in a sense, beautiful. It is the granite of our national structure, and we mean that it shall be sovereign among us, since liberty is secured only through the administration of law. Yet mercy and fraternity should temper justice. Ours is not the hard law of a despot, but a wise law framed by freemen for their own self-government and for the happiness of the community at large. Such, at least, is our ideal: and this strong and yet beautiful building may well express to us and to all comers the

\* This sermon was preached in Pittsburgh, September 23, 1888.

sovereignty and the humanity of the principle whose temple it is. So also the Hebrews did through the temple of Jehovah express His glory and the happiness of His people.

When, now, we would apply the Psalmist's words to our circumstances, what do they mean? The answer is given by the question, What is now the sanctuary of God? The Hebrew temple has passed away, never to be reërected. What has taken its place?

In one sense Jesus is the temple of God, for in Him God dwelt and dwells in all completeness. He Himself said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Jesus, therefore, is the sanctuary of God, at whose feet all men are to worship: and I think you will admit that in Jesus strength and beauty appear as nowhere else among men. He is the ideal man. His character contains every element of strength—profound knowledge, constant faith, ability to suffer for the truth, composure in the face of an assailing world. Yet his character contains also every element of beauty. He is tender as a woman, devoted in His love of man, humble and meek, gentle and patient, too. Each quality exists in accurate proportion in Him; so that we may say, without hesitation and after the closest examination, that the architecture of Christ's character is absolutely perfect.

But also the whole material universe is, in another

sense, the temple of God. God is everywhere. This world is the manifestation of His thought. Even Solomon, when he dedicated the temple, knew this, for he cried, "Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee; how much less this house that I have builded? \* \* \* Hear Thou in heaven, Thy dwelling place: and when Thou hearest, forgive." And I am sure that the student of nature will agree that in this sense also, "strength and beauty are in His sanctuary." We speak of "the powers" of nature, because we cannot but be impressed by the tremendous sweep and capacity of its forces. When, now and then, in some convulsion, they appear, as in the storm or earthquake, we tremble at their awful might; yet they are always working, and the vast and varied world of inorganic objects is built up by the mutual modifications and interplay of these silent forces. It is a mighty world, a world of force, a texture woven out of motion, the investigation of which affords the clearest proof of the power of its Maker. And yet who would not say that it is a beautiful world! By wondrous processes are these mighty forces made to play into each other's hands so as to produce exquisite beauty. Think of the hues of sunset, which no brush can reproduce; of the colors and forms of vegetable life; of the adjustment of part to part in living organisms. God must love beauty, we infer. The Creator



has not merely power, but a mind of infinite skill, for He has not only made this mighty temple of force, but He has so beautified it that it calls for the song of the poet and the joy of the artist, as well as the admiration of the man of science.

“There is a voiceless eloquence in earth,  
Telling of Him who gave her wonders birth;  
And long may I remain the adoring child  
Of Nature's majesty, sublime or wild;  
Hill, flood and forest, mountain, rock and sea—  
All take their terrors and their charms from Thee.  
From Thee—whose hidden but supreme control,  
Moves through the world, a universal soul.”

But if the text is true of Jesus and of nature, it is true also of that spiritual temple of which the New Testament tells us. God dwells in His Church. “Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.” So the individual believer is said to be the temple of God, because God dwells in him. “Know ye not,” says the Apostle, “that ye are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” It is in this sense that I wish to use the words of the text. The sanctuary of God is a human soul that is governed and moulded by God. Such a soul is His temple. Of this is it true that strength and

beauty are in His sanctuary. Or, to put it in other words, a true Christian character is the realization of the highest ideal of what a man should be.

There is nothing in all this busy world which is of such infinite value as are the characters which are being made. Every life is the building of a character, and that a character which, in its essential features, is to last forever. From childhood to old age the process advances. Sometimes we are unconscious of the work that is going on within us until surprised by the discovery that the structure is so far finished that it cannot be changed even though we wish to change it. But whether we are consciously directing the work or not, the building is going up. Some are making hideous structures in which they will themselves be doomed to misery, making jails and dungeons for their own immortal spirits. Others are doing better. But everything a man does reacts upon himself. If he give his life to helping others, he is making his own character noble. If he is injuring others, he is making his own character bad. I do not think that a man should make it his prime thought to cultivate himself. It is better to forget himself and to live for others. But, even then, he is making himself, and every man should at least endeavor to make the most out of the materials which are within him, the opportunities which come to him, and the helps which are about him.

I suppose that every one will admit that a noble character must contain in high degree, and in right proportions, just these two elements of which our text speaks,—strength and beauty. There must be strength of character. You cannot make a house out of sand, because the particles do not cohere to one another. Neither can you make a worthy character out of irresolution, vacillation, doubt, fear, instability. A true man must have ruling convictions, concentration and constancy of purpose, firmness in the right as he sees it, power to endure reverses, positive purposes and ideas. These make a strong character.

A true man also must have these elements of strength adorned by gentler virtues. Manliness is not mere strength. That was the old pagan idea, which has been replaced by a better. There must be refinement of feeling, humanity and benevolence, gentleness and patience. These make character beautiful. And the two elements must combine in right proportion. A merely strong character is as one-sided and imperfect as a pugilist is an abnormal specimen of physical manhood. A merely gentle, loving character is often pitifully weak and unpractical. The two must unite, and, as in good architecture, so in good character-building, the beauty must not exist for its own sake, but to adorn the strength. A true man is strong in his convictions, but gentle in his judgments; constant of purpose, but gentle to the weak and mindful of

others' rights; positive, but humble; energetic, but meek; able to fight when necessary, but always desirous of peace. This is the ideal which Christianity has taught the world, and which the world is slowly coming to understand. It is the ideal of character which I would hold before you; and my declaration is that a true Christian alone will be able to realize this ideal. Only if your souls are God's temples can you be true men; for strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.

Let me briefly suggest the elements of strength in a Christian character.

It is made out of strong material. What is the material which composes Christian character? It is, to express it in one phrase, the confidence of being, for Christ's sake, reconciled with God. That is the granite of which the living sanctuary of God is built. Like the granite, it is composed of several elements. It is, for example, an intense belief, and any man who believes anything with all his might is so far forth a strong man. The strong men of all history have been intense believers: believers in an idea, or believers in a theory, or, if nothing more, believers in themselves. But no man is strong in whom doubt is a permanent quality, and the mere fact that a Christian believes is of itself an element of strength.

But, besides belief, this Christian character is composed of love to God. That of itself means much. It

means that a great change has passed over the man's soul, whereby the naturally selfish tendency of his disposition has been forever reversed. If I may continue the figure of stone, I would say that a new law of crystallization has taken control of the elements of character, so that instead of the tendency to disintegrate, it now becomes harder and harder through being in love with God. The man has now found the right law of his being. He appreciates the supreme beauty and authority of God. He takes from God his standard of life. He desires to be like God. He is confident that God is ruling the world, and therefore he does not fear men, nor fear trial, nor doubt about the issue. A man who thus loves and trusts God cannot but be a strong character. He will not be easily moved by any temptation. He will not be unduly anxious about the future. He will be in no hurry. He will have the calm assurance that, be the present mysteries what they may, all is going well. And he will feel that his life is inseparably linked with the Highest One himself. "Love is strong as death," says the old writer: and if we see instances of the love of man to man in which this is true, much more is it true that in proportion as a human soul loves God will it be firm against evil and strong for all good. The mighty granite masses out of which we quarry the material for our great buildings were once in a fluid, molten state, but they have

crystallized into the hardest of rocks. So will belief in God and Christ, and love to God in Christ, crystallize a soul into the strongest of characters.

Then, too, a Christian character has a strong foundation as well as strong material. The sanctuary of God is built on the rock. I mean that underneath a Christian's life there lies the finished redemption which Jesus Christ has made for all who will accept it. That court-house could not have been built on springing ground or on wooden piles driven in a marsh. The first requirement for a large building is a good foundation. So, I say, the strength of a Christian character lies not only in the material out of which it is made, but in the foundation on which it stands. It stands on Christ, the Rock of Ages. "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them," said Jesus, "I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock." Underneath the Christian is the atonement for him which Jesus offered on Calvary, and the promise of God to justify every believer, and the power of the Saviour, who is even now sitting at the right hand of God, ruling and defending us, and interceding in our behalf. That is a strong foundation. Think of a life which stands on such a rock as that. The strength of a character depends on what it has in reserve, on what is behind the outward appearance, as much as on what is visible. If so, that is the strongest character

which has underneath it and round about it the everlasting arms.

Then a Christian character has strong supports. Its parts are held together by strong beams. Its top rests on strong pillars. These are such as the following. It has a definite aim given to its life, and one which reason and conscience declare to be the highest. It lives for God. It blesses man in order to serve God. It sees in even the commonest work an opportunity of obedience to the heavenly Father; and through all varieties of the fortunes and vicissitudes of life one crowning purpose, one holy spirit runs. It is also cheered by the assurance of God's love. Its love to God is no unreturned affection. On the contrary, it has itself been evoked in answer to God's love to man. So the warmth of God's love is ever falling on a Christian character. It is supported by the promises, as by mighty pillars, which no Samson of infidelity can pull down. It is held together by divine commands, as by iron beams which apportion to each part of its life its proper works, as a building is divided into rooms and stories; while from above the sunlight of hope falls from a never-clouded sky.

Is there not strength in this sanctuary? Such a man is a strong character. The foundation on which he rests, the material out of which his character is composed, the supports by which it is upheld and arranged, are all of granite and of iron. Such a char-

acter is worth having. Its possessor will have a constant source of satisfaction. He cannot but be useful to others. He will be able to guide the thoughts of others. He will be one on whom other men will lean in their times of need. Oh, as we see some men tossed to and fro by doubts until they hardly know what to trust and what to hope for; as we see others yielding like unmanly slaves to every assault of temptation, afraid of men, afraid of pain, afraid of themselves; and trembling as with weak hearts they think of death and the hereafter; we point you with joy to the possibility of every one becoming strong and useful and great, by opening your soul to the God who is willing to inhabit it. Strength is in His sanctuary. If you let Him be your master-builder, you may be strong.

Yes, and your lives may be beautiful as well as strong. For beauty, too, is in His sanctuary. Certainly, it is better to be strong than to be beautiful. The elements of strength are those which do the most important work. It is better that a building should be strong than that it should be ornamental. And the same is true of character as well. Ornament, moreover, ought to overlay strength. It is not good art to put into a building a useless feature merely because it is beautiful. The true artist will beautify the useful. The practical purpose will be first. So a character which aims to be merely beautiful is not to be admired. It becomes mere bric-a-brac. It has the taint of cos-



metics. The man who is absorbed in the mere adornment of his character is not much beyond the man who is absorbed in the adornment of his body. No, beauty must be superimposed upon strength. The practical usefulness and moral power of life are to be the first things sought. Then you have something worth adorning. It is the hard stones which take the best polish. It is the strong, earnest characters which may be made the most beautiful.

But, this being understood, beauty is to be desired. Let me point out, in a word, the beauty of a true Christian life. To my mind, it consists in the right proportion in which every element of a complete manhood exists in it. This certainly is one of the prime elements of beauty of form, whether in man or other things; and a beautiful mind or character is, I think, one marked by this same quality. A beautiful life is one which fulfills the relations in which it is placed, and estimates each one of them at the right value. It can perform the sterner duties and not neglect the gentler ones. It knows when to work and when to play. It renders the tribute due to superiors, inferiors, and equals. In each period of its existence it realizes the idea of that period. Most lives are obviously incomplete. The material side crushes the spiritual; the near obscures the distant; a little truth hides a greater one. Most lives are also obviously ill balanced. The hurry to be rich strangles the duty to be just. The

desire to be great prevents the possibility of being kind. The love of pleasure mortgages the pleasure of the future for the apparent pleasure of the present. Do I not declare something to which your consciences assent when I say that the ordinary life of a worldly man is consciously incomplete and ill balanced, and that even if it be successful, and even if it have the elements of strength, it is not beautiful? It is a distorted life. It is a deformed life. It is a misshapen life. It neglects as much as it attempts to perform.

I point you, therefore, to the beauty of a Christian life. I do not say the life of all Christians, for the best of us are far from perfect; but I point you to the life which has had one perfect exemplification and to which we all aspire. The Christian idea of life is beautiful as well as strong. It considers its duties to God as well as those to men. It praises the passive virtues as much as the active. It does not allow the material to smother the spiritual, nor the spiritual to despise the material. It stoops to little things, and aspires to great things. It teaches man's responsibility for motives as well as his accountability for acts and words. It lives in the world and yet above the world. It combines faith in the transitory character of all earthly things, with energy in the performance of present duty. It reconciles sorrow and joy in human existence. It puts man in his proper sphere, directs his eye toward eternity, enables him to walk and live happily on earth,

makes him useful, and teaches him to die with peace and hope.

This is the life of a soul which is the temple of the living God. Do you not feel that, as a whole, it is complete, and that in its parts it is rightly proportioned? Aye, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. I have seen such characters; doubtless you have, too. I have seen them suffer without fainting, work without murmuring, believe against hope. I have seen them live with God as truly and as manifestly as they lived in their own homes. This model I hold up to you. If you want to be a character of this type, the secret of it lies before you. Not by making your souls the abode of envy and selfishness and passion can your character become strong and beautiful. Not, if you merely fill your mind with knowledge, though it be useful knowledge, can you rise to a complete manhood. You must admit God into your hearts. He will make your souls strong and beautiful.

His Son is the one unblemished example of a sanctuary without a flaw or weakness. Yet you may be conformed unto the image of His Son. I pray you to make your souls His home. Remember that you are building characters—that everything you think and do helps to improve or mar them. Remember that character bears the power of retribution in itself, and that the character you build will be either your prison or your

palace, your torture or your blessing, your hell or your heaven. Remember that you were made to be the dwelling-place of God, and that the very capacity of goodness and greatness which is within you will make the ruin more disastrous if you fall. Make, then, God welcome to your soul. Admit Him. Enthroned Him. Place Him in the holy of holies. Make your life to centre in Him and His word. Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary, and you will find it so. Be you the weakest, be you the vilest, you will become all that a man should be, for His strength will become your strength, His beauty your beauty. Build your character for God and by God's help. Be a true Christian; so will you become a true man.



## XI

### THE FALSE AND THE TRUE MEASUREMENT

“—But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”—2 Cor. x. 12.

To SOME people the world is very small. They know but a little part of it, and this they imagine to be all there is. Or, if not ignorant, they think that only the part with which they are intimately connected is worth knowing or considering. To them this is practically the world. They belong to a small circle which plays the same part in their lives that empires and millions play in the lives of nations. It may be a social, a political, a literary, or a religious coterie; or it may combine several of these characteristics. But its smile is their joy, its frown their sorrow. To stand first in it is their ambition. Their keenest pleasure is its applause; their deepest mortification is its contempt. It gives them their standard of living; it prescribes their rewards and their privations; it creates and limits their aspirations. In short, their little coterie is their world, and within its circle there rage all the passions and there exist all the pleasures of a larger life, just as a drop of water, under the microscope, looks like a little sea.

Yet the real world without may not even be aware that their little coterie exists. It is, in fact, but a squad of a company in a regiment of a brigade in a single division of the army. Were it annihilated, the loss would not be great. To those who have seen more of the world, its rewards appear trifling and its opposition is a matter of indifference. Its standards are seen to fall far short of reality. It is a petty affair itself, and its measurements and comparisons are presumptuous or amusing. Whether it be a king's court, or a religious sect, or a social clique, or any other kind of fraternity, its ambitions and jealousies and laurels, to one who has become aware of a greater world beyond it, appear as insignificant as a child's life does in comparison with a man's.

Nevertheless, in these little spheres are our lots cast. We cannot be citizens of the world. We must be identified with particular places and people. It is only the narrow spirit which mistakes our circle for the world against which we are to contend. To be really wise, we must learn to look beyond our own contracted sphere; must catch sight of the real world outside of it; must try to realize the small part which we and our company play in the life of the countless host of humanity; must seek to find the fuller truth which lies beyond, and then must return to the little world in which we must needs live, bringing into it the standards and the aims which are drawn from the

greater world without, and by which even the least affairs may be dignified and made honorable.

I see this idea intimated in our text. It appears that the little Corinthian church had become such a narrow coterie as I have described, and the great apostle was sorely vexed by its divisions and its jealousies. It was split into parties, and amid their contentions the greater Church without and the world-wide mission of the Gospel were forgotten. They were chiefly concerned with the eloquence of this or that preacher. They probably thought that there was no church so important as that in Corinth, and began to boast of themselves over against each other and those outside, until the heart of St. Paul was ready to break with grief over their folly.

In contrast with his broad, catholic mind, how petty seem their shameful brawls! From his point of view this was but one of many churches; Greece but one of many lands. The world was the object of his solicitude. His plans embraced the Roman Empire itself. His laurels, too, were those given not by man, but by God. His whole estimate of himself and of them, and his view of truth and life, were in magnificent contrast to their narrow and petty spirit. His was the eye of a statesman and the heart of a pioneer, and he seems to have expressed himself moderately when he assured them, in view of their little cliques and parties, that they who measure



themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves, are not wise.

Let us take this, as we have seen, a too common error, and see if, in principle, it be not the great error of mankind,—if it be not the practical mistake by which, more than by aught else, men's consciences are dulled, their desire for true character is perverted, and an appreciation of Jesus Christ is prevented. We have spoken of the little, trivial coteries in which men often find their world. Let us now look not at them, but at the actual world itself, and see how men, in like manner, take from it their standards and measurements, unmindful of what still lies beyond it.

Is not this the common way? Men measure themselves among themselves, and compare themselves with themselves. Human society is the gauge of virtue. This world's laurels are its sole desire. The frown of the world chills the heart; its transient applause fills the heart with joy. Men are afraid to face the ridicule or opposition of others. They imitate each other slavishly. One rich or successful man becomes a model to a hundred. What society thinks, is esteemed to be truth and right. Social custom is law. In fine, the common way of the world is to make it the measure of its own virtue and the giver of its own reward. It is only a larger coterie. Its principle of judgment is but the working out, on a wider scale, of the narrowness of folly which the world itself

satirizes when it is practised in some smaller circle within its own bounds. For, meanwhile, one who has caught sight of a still greater universe beyond this world, feels that the world's standard is still too small. This is the very thing which in all ages and in all religions has made prophets and martyrs. The world itself honors those who have denied and defied its standards. They have believed that its rewards were not worthy to be compared with those which a greater world would give. They have believed that they saw truth scouted or perverted by society, and have chosen to live for it, in spite of society's customs. To them, therefore, the world at large is guilty of the same folly of which the narrowest clique is.

You take one who has always lived in a secluded place and introduce him to the business or society of a metropolis, and the effect upon him will fairly illustrate what inspiration works in a mind when it reveals to it the issues of this life, and the measurements which prevail in the vaster world beyond our present range of vision. From such a revelation one returns with an oppressive sense of the partiality and pettiness of this world's judgments, and with the feeling that many of them will be forever reversed when life is measured by the standard of absolute truth and worth.

Let me point out some of the ways in which this folly is practised, and the first two shall be ways

in the criticism of which we shall doubtless all be agreed.

Take the matter of culture or knowledge. Who is the wise man? Shall we decide this by measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves? Some do so. The besetting sin of culture is pride, and this because it is so prone to compare itself favorably with the less educated multitude. It is apt to congratulate itself that it knows more than others. It has read more widely. It is familiar with more languages. It has accumulated a larger store of facts. It has studied Nature and the sciences, and is instructed in the wonderful discoveries and the equally wonderful theories of the day. In its coarser forms, this becomes mere pedantry. The man who boasts of his education must have a very low standard. Nothing is more offensive than such pedantry, with its displays of learning which are so often combined with really profound ignorance.

True culture is not guilty of this folly,—and for the reason that it is more impressed by the greater amount yet to be known than by the comparatively little which has been acquired. Instead of comparing itself with the ignorance of others, it will think of those who are still more advanced and press on toward their place. Is its study history? It will caution us in drawing inferences, and make us conscientious in the investigation of facts. Is nature

its study? It will recognize that but a little space has been cleared, and vastly more is still shrouded in darkness. Hence humility is an essential mark of true culture. It will be ready to admit mistakes. It will feel the need of caution. It will wholly revolt from the measurements which the world is apt to make, and feel rather that they are not worthy to be named in the presence of the ideal of truth and knowledge which the really wise man has.

Or turn from culture to consider social position. Who is the great man? Who is the honorable man? Shall we decide by measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves? Some do so. One is a little richer than another; one thinks himself a little better born and bred. One has mounted on a little pinnacle of political fame, and for the moment is the object of all eyes. The world is full of such little great men,—great in the view of this or that nation,—it may be only of this or that party; and by comparing the outward state of men's lives,—by measuring their fortunes or their renown,—the world is apt to decide who shall bear its honorable names. Yet the world itself knows that its estimate is false, and it ridicules the favored objects of its own judgment. It cannot help seeing that time changes the relative positions of men, and that what is so changeable cannot be of real worth. Society is almost as restless and varying as the waves

of the sea; now the drops are on the crest, and now they are in the trough of the billows. The world, I say, itself feels that character is the only test of real worth, as it is the only thing that lasts through the changes, and that character must be judged by a far higher standard than that which ordinary society employs. To rely on the judgments of society in this matter is folly, for these judgments are soon reversed. There must be another test, found not in society, but in the great ideals of virtue, purity, and righteousness, of which ordinary society is but dimly conscious, but which, in reality, decide true worth.

So far, I suppose, all will agree, and yet we have not applied the principle in the really most important direction. We have only to apply it to morals in order to become aware of the real danger which lurks in our common error. For, let us ask, Who is the good man? Shall we decide this, too, by measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves? Many do so. Is not this, in fact, the common way of estimating moral characters? Men say, "The good man is he who fulfils the social standard." Society requires a certain amount of honesty, a certain amount of decency, ordinary truthfulness, general morality of life. It is not particular as to the motives from which these spring. It is content with the thing itself. Neither is it particular about the degree to which these are carried. If men are hard

pressed, they may quietly violate the social standard without much danger.

But the gauge of goodness is the outward habits of society, the common customs of the country. It is a standard which does not concern itself with the motives which lie beneath conduct, or with the heaven which lies above it, but only with the society which lies about it and on the same plane with itself. Hence the practical test of goodness is just this comparison of one with another. Men say, "Look at the vicious, the criminal classes, that violate with impunity the social laws: are we not much better than they? Nay, look at the men of our class. I am as honest as yonder Christian; as self-respecting, as much trusted in the world. I am not guilty of the follies in which these others quietly indulge. I am not mean or stingy like some one else I know. I am quite as liberal as those who belong to the Church." Such is the theory of many people, and such the practice of many more. They measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves. The whole question of their own moral worth is decided by a comparison of their own with the virtues or vices of other men. They never rise beyond the judgment of this world. In a multitude of ways, both great and little, their whole estimate of goodness turns on differences which may be noted in mankind itself.

Now we say, with the apostle, of such a doctrine of goodness, that it is not wise: both because it is necessarily proud and because it is evidently partial. It is proud. There is in it the very essence of self-righteousness. The most it can do for a man is to make him satisfied with himself. If he comes up to its mark, he is apt to be conceited and boastful; perhaps not offensively, but yet in a quiet, complacent way, undoubtedly so. Its judgment does not go beyond that of the Pharisee: "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." Then it is evidently a partial and ignorant estimate. It is ignorant in its judgment of other people. What does this complacent critic know of the real life of the neighbors with whom he favorably contrasts himself? They may have virtues of which he knows absolutely nothing. He is ignorant, too, of his own real state. He does not think how his motives and principles appear when judged from a higher point of view.

This is the common morality of the world. It is the great foe to the gospel. It is the shield under which multitudes hide themselves from the arrows of God's truth. And what is it, when fairly examined, but the same narrow and foolish spirit which in the matters of culture and social position we are so ready to condemn? Oh, it is impossible that this should not be a great mistake. If, from our broader knowledge of the world and of mankind, we look down with disdain on

the little cliques and coteries in which some narrow minds find their standard and their happiness; if the man who has travelled and observed much, ridicules the pettiness of those who think their little sect or village the pattern and gauge of the universe; ought not we, who too frequently find in this larger world its own judge and own jury, to look upward and beyond it, and ask if there be not a larger sphere still, of which ours is but a fragment? God tells us that there is. Conscience tells us so. The very ideals of truth and righteousness tell us so. There are many mountain peaks from which we look out on the mighty universe, and from which our hamlets below are scarcely visible; and from these ought you and I to return to our daily spheres not to measure ourselves by ourselves, or to compare ourselves among ourselves, but rather convinced that it is for man to be humble in his culture, humble in his estimate of his own importance, and, most of all, humble in his opinion of his own character and moral deserts.

Thus, then, in some way the common error must be escaped. Yet as men are by nature they have scarcely any other test available. They have certain instinctive ideals, certain great aspirations after a nobler life, but these are vague and impracticable instructors. Is there no other standard by which men may estimate themselves? Let us confine ourselves to the question of goodness. This is the really important question, and



the one about which there is the most difference of opinion. If we are not to measure ourselves by ourselves, and compare ourselves among ourselves, with what are we to be measured and compared?

The Bible answers this, as I have intimated, by disclosing a world above this. It takes us to the lofty tops of its Sinai, and Hermon, and Olivet, and to the spot called Calvary, where a still wider view of the unseen world is offered. The Bible does for us in this matter what the Copernican theory has done for astronomy. It locates this world in its real place and relations in the universe. The astronomer has now mapped out the heavens, and as in fancy the mind flies under his guidance through the measureless distances of space,—as the multitudinous stars resolve themselves into systems,—one begins to feel that the earth is a much smaller affair than we have thought; that so far from being the centre of the universe, it is one of the least of its constituent members, and that, whatever may be true of the earth itself, the universe must have been created for far wider ends than the mere life of the sons of Adam.

So does the Christian revelation disclose a spiritual universe above this world. We discover that the battle between good and evil, of which each of us knows something in his own soul, is a conflict in which spiritual powers of good and evil are engaged. It opens to us a world of angelic and glorified beings;


and then it passes beyond even these to disclose Christ, in whom there shines forth the character of the unseen, eternal, infinite God. It does not stop until it thus reaches the centre and source of all existence, and from this lofty point it shows that all things, down to the very least in the scale, have worth according as they do or do not fulfil their part in relation to Him who is above all. Here, then, we reach the only point of view for a just estimate, and the comparison of man with man seems now still more petty and worthless. Here we discover the law to be kept, the ideal to be realized, the test to be applied. Earth is but the footstool of the great King. We who live at His feet are to see in Him the measure of moral worth. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Thus we learn what is man's only true life, and thereby we can measure ourselves as we never can do under the influence of false views of life generated by the world. The Lord told us the great secret when He said, "This is life eternal that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent"—and the apostle makes the practical application of this now open secret when he sets over against the petty jealousies and ambitions of Corinth this motto: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." His words are quoted from Jeremiah, and the old prophet's language is worth re-

membering. "Thus saith the Lord," he cried, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me."

You see that this is the divine idea of what human life ought to be. It is that manner of thinking, and living, and acting which is determined by the knowledge of God Himself. It differs from the common life of men by being determined by a different object. The life of most men, such as I have described it, is determined by the customs, the laws, the pursuits of other men, and of the world. These make up life's environment. From them it takes its standards and tests. By them it measures and compares itself. In them it lives. But this is not our proper element. This is not our true life. We were made to be determined in all our living by God himself. This is life, yea, eternal life, to know Him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

Take a child of naturally fine abilities and of high birth, and place him amongst the poor and ignorant, and in vicious surroundings, and he will be contaminated by them. They will supply his idea of life. If he be a little better than most of his associates, he will still be infected by their ways. Yet he was not made for that. He was made for a purer circle and a nobler



lot, and he will discover his true character, he will be able to judge of his unfortunate circumstances, only by being taken back into the place which ought to have been his at the first. Then in a new home, with new friends, with better aims, he discovers his true life, and he looks back with horror equally at the state in which he once was, and at the ignorance with which he was then blinded.

So when God comes into a man's sight, when he knows God and begins to love Him, a new life begins. Then at once the man's estimate of himself changes. Instead of comparing himself with others, he compares himself with God. Instead of thinking how much he is above others, he thinks how far he is below God. And, what is still more important, instead of judging others and himself by outward deeds, he judges himself at least by the inner state of his heart. He feels that life with God is a matter not of the body, but of the soul, and that every motive of the mind ought to be in harmony with God. Thereupon he begins to question his motives. He looks more narrowly into his passions and appetites. He is ashamed of his thoughts. He feels that he owes duties to God as well as to men. Religion becomes a necessity for him. His true life is a religious life. He thinks not of human society with its narrow and changing views, but of divine society with its real and eternal relations. His pride is

rebuked. His selfishness begins to blush. He becomes aware of his sinfulness. He sees what he ought to be and knows that he is not. He cries no longer, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are!" He does not even consider what other men are, for at them he looks no longer. He looks at God, and then at his own soul, and cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

I would like you to note in what ways God has provided for our becoming aware of the true measurement of life. What means does He employ thus to show us what we ought to be and are not?

There is, first, the revelation of His law,—the old Jewish way, and yet a way still to be used. He has revealed to us our duty, and it is summed up, as Christ said, in these words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." See what a law this is! It regards not our acts so much as our motives. Thou shalt love! It makes God supreme and first. It puts our neighbors on a level with ourselves. We cannot but admit that such would be the noblest life; and this is God's revealed law—the least violation of which is sin.

Paul describes the change wrought thus in him. Once without the law, when he paid it no attention, he was alive. He thought himself so. He was proud of his attainment of self-righteousness. He was the

typical Pharisee. He measured himself with the Gentiles, compared himself with the publicans. "I am holier than thou." But by the grace of God the commandment came to him, that is, he realized its requirements. He became aware how far short he had fallen. How he had sinned against man and God. He looked at it as an impossible peak that he never could climb. Sin revived within him—he became conscious of its presence—and he died—he felt himself a lost, disobedient man. Let any one now do the same, face the law, look at its requirement, and even the man who by earthly measurements ranks the highest, will be forced to say that, like all the rest, he, too, is a sinner.

But God has taken a still more effective way of showing us the true standard. He has embodied His whole law in the character of one, Jesus Christ, His Son. The character of Christ is the simple, practical, universally applicable standard by which we can rebuke the partial false measurements of the world. Christ has made a new ideal of life for men. He is like the rising sun, in whose light we see the hue and shape of things. How narrow the Jews look, how poor the royalty of Herod, how presumptuous the claims of Rome, before Him! He has left us an example that we should follow His steps; "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He

suffered, He threatened not ; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously." Here is living for God in its perfection—by faith, by obedience, by self-sacrifice, in pureness, in love. When on earth, He silenced the disciples who contended as to which was the greatest, by showing them that they were to be servants of all. He awakened the sense of sin in the minds of all who appreciated His beauty. He was and is God's great rebuke to us as well as our Saviour,—saving because rebuking, leading to life with God, because showing the folly and sin of life with the world.

Let a man bring himself into Christ's presence, and he will feel that his life needs renovation. Though, measuring himself with others, he may be inclined to flatter his pride, it is not so when measuring himself with Christ. Here the best and the poorest, according to our estimate, say, "We are not worthy." In Christ, man sees his duty and his failure, his ideal and his sad reality. The petty differences between men themselves seem small before this difference between all men and Christ. Before Him it is impossible to measure ourselves by ourselves, and compare ourselves among ourselves. We are too conscious of the comparison with Him, and at the feet of Jesus, pride, self-righteousness, jealousy, envy,—all that is false and mean,—hide their heads in shame, feeling themselves to be only the more condemned.

I appeal to you practically to make this the test

of yourselves. Some of us are under this delusion: we measure ourselves with other people. We think we are as good as they are, that if they are saved, certainly we shall be. Perhaps meaner thoughts,—jealous and envious,—lurk within. But let us not look at others at all. In this matter we have nothing to do with them. We are before God. What is His judgment? What is the real truth? I do not see how anyone can venture to measure himself with Christ without feeling his need of redemption, of entire renewal; his need of atoning blood and of divine spiritual power. I plead with you to cast your self-confidence to the winds. Look beyond this little world, these narrow spheres, the ignorance and blunders of common life; look up to God. Feel that you were made for Him, and that you need Him. Take His estimate of you rather than the world's. Take His way of salvation. Think of God's judgment, and seek from Jesus Christ the eternal life.





## XII

### ENOCK

“And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.”—GENESIS v. 24.

THE men through whom God speaks to us most plainly are commonly exceptional characters. In some marked particulars they differ from the common types, and the points in which they differ are those from which we learn the most. They emphasize so strongly some principle that it becomes a peculiar mark which distinguishes them from other men, and is apt to absorb their whole attention and make them in some respects one-sided or, at least, men of one idea. God does not intend all to be like them in this, but, in order that the truth which they convey may be given its fair share in the attention of others, it must be intensely exhibited in the lives of a few. Truth must sometimes be even exaggerated in order to be established. It will find afterwards its true place and proportion, but at the beginning it must be proclaimed as if it alone were true. They who bear in their lives, therefore, the messages of God to us have been exceptional characters. The Bible often exhibits but one view of their lives in order that it alone may

be remembered. They are meant to stand out boldly and in relief from the common level of the world that they may catch our eyes and impress our minds.

In some such relief the figure of Enoch stands out from the dull, monotonous list of the antediluvian patriarchs. They all, indeed, appear to have been exceptions to the common life and habits of their distant age. We know almost nothing of that former world. The Bible does not delay upon it, further than to trace the two great lines of the children of Cain and those of Seth. It was written for us to whom the world after the flood,—the world which began again in the children of Noah,—is practically the only world. It hastens over the long lives of the early patriarchs with scarcely more than mention of their names. We see indicated only that among the descendants of Cain some progress was made in the arts; that cities were founded; that the true religion was preserved among a few, while the majority of men fell into very evil ways; that, as in later times, the wicked persecuted the righteous. These are about the only items of information that have been handed down. The whole race was soon swept away, and history was to take a new start. It was unnecessary, therefore, to do more than connect the later age with that of the first temptation and the fall; and to do this by recording the list of faithful men who, unlike the mass of their contemporaries, preserved from generation to generation the

faith which in the new age after the deluge was to be first conserved and then spread abroad.

But while of the other patriarchs, whose long lives connected Adam, the father of the first world, with Noah, the father of the second, nothing is known beyond the fact of their existence and the length of their lives, the sacred writers have intimated that Enoch was especially noteworthy. He was evidently a vigorous exception to the society of his day. He appears to have been a prophet; like Noah, too, a preacher of righteousness; and to have boldly declaimed against the sins of the men about him, warning them of their certain punishment. This we learn from the book of Jude, where that writer seems to place the seal of inspiration upon the common Jewish tradition of his day, telling us that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied against all future unrighteousness, saying, "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him." This single extract gives us a glimpse into the moral position which Enoch occupied. He was a protestant against the ways of the world about him. He proclaimed the inevitable coming of the Lord to judgment. In the eyes of the later Christian writer, Enoch was the first

of the long line of prophets and apostles who have rebuked the sins of their several ages, and warned men to fly from the wrath to come.

But this early prophet seems to have been not only an exception to the mass of society about him, but exceptional even among the good. For why else should the writer of Genesis have thought him worthy of special comment even in this meagre and rapid genealogy? This fifth chapter of Genesis is solemn in its very brevity. It is like the tolling of a bell, announcing birth and death. It tells us of the vanity of life, when generations come and go with a mention only of their entrance and their exit. It is human life skeletonized. We hear in it the tramp of battalions of the dead. It reduces life to its simplest elements. "Seth lived a hundred and five years and begat Enos; and Seth lived after he begat Enos eight hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters: and all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died." That is a specimen of the whole. Eight times the simple words "and he died" dismiss, as with a gesture, the lives of men whose years reached to centuries, and who doubtless did much that was noble and good during the term of their pilgrimage. But over Enoch the writer lingers for a moment. There was something in his religious life worthy of special remembrance. It is summed up in the expressive words, "He walked with God." He

was saintlier than even the saints; more devout than even the faithful. His reproofs came well from the lips of one who seemed to be ever in the presence of the Almighty. While the art and the culture of that dim age have perished, while even the good deeds of good men have been unrecorded, the character of the man of whom it was right to say emphatically that he walked with God, has been preserved to be an example and a stimulus to us men of a new world and a later day.

That this was no false judgment of posterity upon the character of Enoch is proved by the fact that he was honored by being, most of all, exceptional in the manner of his departure from earth. He did not live as long as the rest of the patriarchs. All the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. He suddenly disappeared. It has been supposed by some that he was persecuted, and that the simple phrase, "God took him," is designed to intimate that the Lord caught him away from the hatred of a wicked world. At any rate, long before the natural term of his life was reached, "he was not found, for God had translated him." We are told nothing of the manner of his translation. We hear of no chariots of fire, as in the case of Elijah. But, from a life with God on earth, he was taken to a closer life with God elsewhere, and thus peculiar honor was set upon his name; and as by his character he gave the world an

example of how to live, so in his departure hence he has given a lesson of how such a life may end.

Thus his dim form becomes somewhat more distinct as we study it. The moral of his life is plain. He is no gigantic myth. Ignorance has not exaggerated his shape and deeds. The sober quiet of inspiration has been maintained even in this most ancient tradition; and the name of Enoch suggests now just what God intended it to suggest. The exceptional features of his life have been preserved for our instruction. The rest may perish with the age to which Enoch belonged.

We may consider first the description of his character. He is not the only man in Scripture of whom it is said that he walked with God. The same is said of Noah; and in one of the Psalms (the 16th) we find an expression which intimates a like fellowship. "I have set the Lord always before me," says David; "because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." In connection, however, with most others of the ancient saints we have another phrase, expressive of a less intimate communion with God. Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are said to have walked before the Lord, as though they were ever mindful of His watchful eye. So Hezekiah prayed, "I beseech Thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before Thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Thy sight." The Psalmist likewise exclaims, "I will walk before the Lord in the

land of the living." This phrase, "To walk with God," seems to suggest more intimate companionship. Very often do we see the beginning and the end of a process of history converge; and so here, in the dawn of religion, this patriarch anticipated the closer fellowship with his Maker which Christ has now instituted with His people, but which the Jewish dispensation, with its strong consciousness of sin, did not always as fully exhibit. We are reminded of how Christ promised, "Lo, I am with you alway," and of how He prayed for us, "That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." We recall also the apostle's declaration, "Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." This, I say, Enoch did. By him Eden had been regained, and, almost as man had done before the fall, he walked with God.

Now we have in this the model of a spiritual Christian life, and I would like you to compare your daily living with this example. We here see a man on terms of intimate fellowship with God. There is the interchange of thought between them. The Maker receives the aspiration, the prayer, and the love of the creature; and the creature receives directly, without any intervention, the truth, the love, the spiritual influence of his Maker. It is the communion of friends,—no less real because the one is infinitely greater than the other. What a marvellous truth this is! How incredible it



has always seemed to skeptical minds, and equally so to those that are merely superstitious. How false religion has cast man prostrate at the feet of his Maker, like a slave before a savage lord, utterly ignorant of the compassion of Him who said, "I call you not servants, but friends, for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you"! How philosophy has ridiculed the notion of God communing with man,—has bound Him in His majesty or in His law,—not permitting Him to touch His creatures save through the agency of force and nature! But how sublimely has practical experience disproved both superstition and philosophy, and demonstrated the truth of Bible teaching, that like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him, and that He is not far from any one of us! This representation does not degrade the Almighty. Far from it. It humanizes God indeed. But then it is the very summit-truth of revelation, that God has become man; and the possibility of such direct spiritual fellowship was forever established when the Son of God appeared on earth and mingled with the life of man, and when He, departing, said, "A little while and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me: because I live, ye shall live also." But how it exalts man!

We say, then, that Enoch gave us the model which all truly spiritual minds have sought to follow,

and just in proportion as this personal fellowship is felt will faith be mighty. A few years since, in France, a woman who had found Christ through the work of the McAll Mission, gathered some friends in her room to read the Scriptures, and when she had finished she led them in prayer. When she rose, one exclaimed in astonishment, "Do you talk in that way to God?" Never had the poor soul dared to speak freely to his Maker. Never before had he thought it possible to find the Almighty for himself and in his own soul. Yet this is the personal religion of the Bible; and as the force which holds the worlds together does so by acting upon each little atom of matter, so is the infinite God revealed in His union with single spirits, that every one may exhibit His grace and receive His friendship.

Not only so; with Enoch this fellowship was not, as so often with others, an occasional thing, but the daily habit of his life. He *walked* with God, as though in the ordinary duties of life his unseen friend went with him; as though with each step of his pilgrimage his guide accompanied and counselled him. Many men, perhaps all, have seasons of special devotion,—know what it is occasionally to commune with God. Perhaps they prepare for these times, or perhaps they come like flashes of joyful revelation to the soul. But they are hallowed moments, to which, when gone, they look back with gratitude, and for

whose return they long. All this is well,—is, I suppose, inevitable, but there is danger here. Men are apt to limit to such times the possibility of communion. They identify their power with these seasons. The rest of life becomes almost irreligious by contrast. Religion becomes a thing of spasms, a periodic matter, the summer heat of love followed by the wintry blasts of forgetfulness and worldliness. They may be in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and then think it proper on week days to be altogether in the flesh.

There is an old legend, which Whittier has versified, intended to teach the peril of overvaluing these seasons of special illumination. It tells of a saint, praying in his cell, to whom a vision of the Lord appeared. But while the disciple gazed in rapture on the blessed face of Christ, he heard the bell of the monastery, calling him to go forth, as was his custom, to feed at the gate the poor and hungry, who came there at the hour of noon. How strong the temptation to stay and enjoy the vision! But the good monk obeyed the call of duty, left his place of privilege, performed his task, and then returned to think of the vision he had seen, when lo! he found it waiting for him. "Hadst thou remained," said the Christ, "I must have gone; because thou didst go, I have remained."

Very truly may we learn from this that the life of true fellowship with God is not to be found in mere contemplation, but in the daily walks of life. Yea, the

vision will not only tarry for us, it will go with us. Enoch gave us the true idea. It is, not to stand or kneel with God merely, but to walk with Him. We may have God's presence in our shops and offices as well as in the church; as we walk the streets we may hear the noiseless step of the unseen Guide; in the doing of daily work, even in our times of recreation, God may be with us and we may walk with God. I do not mean that daily life is to be an ecstasy. We need not be always conversing with our Friend. We are to do our work and take our play. But we are always to feel Him near, so that when we have aught to say, we may say it; when we need aught, we may ask for it; when we desire, we may converse with Him. This would be to carry heaven in our hearts. Sin would not then easily assail us. Our hidden foes would fly from that divine form. We should realize in full force what it is to be reconciled with God,—how deep, how real a meaning Christ's promise had. In short, we should walk with Him, and our steps, however many, would be always tending toward the place where God will give us rest.

Such, then, was the exceptional type of character manifested by this ancient man of God, and I would like to point out to you the light which other passages of Scripture throw upon the question of how such a life may be attained.

The first condition of thus dwelling with God is

humility. This is brought out by the prophet Micah when he says, "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" or, as it should be rendered, "to humble thyself to walk with God." Think of it! Humble thyself to walk with God! How strange! He might deem it a humbling thing to walk with us, He who is infinite, almighty, supreme, with us who are weak, sinful, rebellious. But for us to humble ourselves to walk with Him! Is not such fellowship our greatest honor? Are we not permitted by it to enter into a communion in which angels themselves rejoice? How can it be true that humility is its condition? Alas, experience testifies that this is only too sadly true. The heart of man has been caught by the false show of earthly splendor: his tastes perverted, his poor soul made to aspire to imaginary goods. He is proud too of his strength and independence, so that in his judgment it is a humbling thing to walk with God!

Has it not ever been so? Did not Christ say, "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake"? Did not Paul say, "God hath chosen the weak things of the world, . . . and things which are despised"? Do we not read that He makes His abode in the hearts of the lowly and the contrite? It has, indeed, ever been found so. You cannot reach this lofty height of spiritual fellowship,—this life when you may enter the company of

prophets and apostles,—save by renouncing your own works, by confessing your own sins, by feeling, in fine, your own great need of divine help. The way to the kingdom always leads through a strait gate; and he who knows the power and glory of his religion, he who would have the peace which the world can neither give nor take away, is he who seeks God not in the spirit of the Pharisee, but in that of the publican, and who has the humble heart and the mind that is self-abased.

Then to this we should add that other verse, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" The prophet Malachi describes the holy life of one of the patriarchs in these words, "He walked with me in peace and equity." It is impossible to maintain the spiritual life of which we are speaking if the heart be set on those things with which God can have no sympathy. How long do earthly friendships last when you become interested in objects in which your friend has no interest? Gradually you drift apart. There may be no open rupture, but the tide of sympathies sweeps you away. Friendship must have some basis, some connecting link. It is the union of souls. Merely to live next to a man does not make him your friend. If you and he have no thoughts, no pursuits, no objects in common, your friendship will not last, and is probably not worth maintaining.

This may illustrate our life with God. No man can

walk with God if his heart be bent upon the world. The thoughts of God find no response within his mind if the plans and the cause of God are of less value to him than his own selfish plans and pleasures. It is vain for that man to sigh after a spiritual life. It is vain for him to perform outward acts of religion. His fellowship with God is a pretense. Not unless you and your Redeemer have something in common can you walk with Him. Not unless you feel in sympathy with His mind may you suppose Him to be in sympathy with yours. In short, only those who are willing to humble themselves and become as little children can enter into the society of Him who is meek and lowly, holy and pure. When you consider the glory of such a life as Enoch's, and the means by which it may be attained, do you not see what Jesus meant when he said, "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted"? Happy are they who have learned the lesson of real humility, and in whose minds has been kindled enthusiasm for the cause of God. They shall walk in the light of His countenance. Alike amid the press of daily duties and in the sweeter hours of worship and meditation, they shall know the ineffable joy and peace of walking with God.

Let me turn your thoughts now for a moment to Enoch's translation. The simple record in Genesis is, "He was not; for God took him." This of itself

does not necessarily mean that he did not die. We are assured of its real meaning, however, by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who tells us that "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." Such, too, we might infer from Genesis, since Enoch is the only one in its list of patriarchs of whom it is not distinctly said that he died. The unusual phrase, "God took him," points to some unusual way of exit from the world. But in its simplicity this account is very suggestive. One other man in the Bible is said to have been translated, but how very different the ends of Elijah and Enoch! The stern prophet of Gilead,—who had been as a fiery blast to his country, whose prayers had scorched the fields for three years, and who had brought down fire from heaven on the priests of Baal,—naturally passed heavenward in a chariot of fire. The whole character of Elijah was so rugged and fierce, that no gentle exit would have suited his story. He had been God's thunderbolt, hurled against the guilty house of Ahab, and so in a whirlwind he ascended to God who had inspired his tongue. But of Enoch we are simply told that he disappeared. Apparently, no one saw his departure. The implication of the language of Scripture is that men sought for him, but he had gone. God quietly took him to Himself. As he had long



walked with God, so God, by some unusual way, one day called him home.

Now what meant the translation of these two prophets? Why did God in their cases depart from His usual ways and deem the common portal insufficient? We cannot say fully, but we may see certain consequences which followed from it, and which may partly explain His reasons. Thus in the case of Elijah, his translation was the means of showing evidently the continuance of his work in that of Elisha. On the latter prophet Elijah's mantle fell. The two men did one work. They can be understood only when viewed together. Elijah destroyed, that Elisha might construct; Elijah laid the foundation, that Elisha might build upon it. Elijah's work was unfinished, and hence the expectation that he would come again before the Messiah. His translation at least exhibited the unity between him and his successor. Not even death divided them. The same is still more strongly brought out by the ascension of Christ, which also may be called a translation; for Christ ascended that we might feel Him still to be living and working; feel that the Church is still under His care; that, as Luke says, on earth He began His work and is now finishing it in heaven. It is thus that we look also at the disappearance of Enoch. Whether for the sake of others or for his own, the impression made is that the patriarch's pure and godly life was continued; it went right on; it

was not broken even by death. God wishes us to perceive that one who lives in fellowship with Himself is already ripe for the close fellowship of heaven. There is no break in the journey. Such a life on this and that side of the grave is the same. On that side it needs only to be perfected and confirmed. But it is the same life,—life with God.

Thus, then, the translation of Enoch reveals to us what is true of many, who are not translated. God, by this exceptional departure of this exceptional man, has shown us distinctly what ought to be true of all. Enoch stands forth as the proof that a truly Christian life destroys death. The sting of death is sin, but for the Christian, sin has been forgiven. The strength of sin is the law, but for the Christian, the law has been obeyed and satisfied. Death, therefore, is for him not what it once was. It is not punishment. It is but the departure to God. Of multitudes may we say as truly as of Enoch, "They were not, for God took them,"—since, death being thus transformed, it matters not whether it come or not. We shall not all die, but, like Enoch and Elijah, we shall all be changed. That is the meaning of death to the Christian. God takes His servant to Himself,—away from temptation, and persecution, and trial,—to perfect rest, perfect bliss, perfect purity. It was not the absence of death in Enoch's case which is the principal point, so much as the conquest of death by faith in God.

Have you never seen nor heard of dying men of whom all that is here said of the patriarch could be truly said? Paul died at the block; but he had already said that it was better "to depart and be with Christ." "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand." "One of the Scottish martyrs, standing on a ladder from which they were to throw him off, assured the weeping spectators that he had never gone up to his pulpit with so little fear as he had mounted that ladder to die. To him it was a perch from which his spirit, wearied of a world full of sin and sorrows, was spreading out its joyful wings for the flight to heaven." Nay, speak not of apostles and martyrs. The same triumph has been enjoyed by thousands of ransomed souls. Men, women, and children have passed through the valley without a murmur, or, if the passage were hard and painful, still with the light of heaven gleaming in their dying eyes, and the soul translated while the body fell to dust. How is this? Because in this life they had found God; because here they had learned somewhat of how to walk with Him, tremblingly, lamely, perhaps, but still humbly, and relying not on their own merits, but on His grace.

They have been translated, I say. They have not seen death, as death really is. They are not, for God has taken them. That is all. We, standing on the hither verge of the grave, have sought to

heal their pains, to cheer their spirits, to revive their strength, and it may be that when we can no longer find them we are bowed with grief, the bitter tears flow fast; we wonder where they are, we think, and guess, and ponder, while the heart grows heavier with its load. But to them,—ah, to them,—what is death? The struggling life has found full expression now. Faith has become sight. The love that once was often interrupted, flows forth impassioned now. They are with God. Still, they walk with God. Their Christian life has reached its goal, and the pain of the exit from earth has already been forgotten in the joy of the entrance into heaven. They are not—for God has taken them! What more can we say? What more can we want? Be our deaths how and when they may, is it not enough to know that with faith in Christ our Saviour, there is no sting, there is no darkness, there is only in store for us God's "Welcome home"?



## XIII

### THE WISE WOMAN OF TEKOA

“For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person [*or* and God doth not cast away a soul]: yet [*but*] doth He devise means, that His banished be not expelled from Him.”—2 SAMUEL xiv. 14.

THESE words were spoken by a woman arrayed in deep mourning, and they were directed to King David. The speaker is called a wise woman. She is known now as the wise woman of Tekoah. Whether that means that she professed to be a magician, or simply that she had clever wit, is hard to say. It is not unlikely that she traded on her reputation for wisdom; was a sort of fortune-teller, perhaps; and hence had acquired influence in the neighborhood. It may be, however, that she was simply a cunning and shrewd person, and so naturally fitted for the task through which we have made her acquaintance. She was before the king at Joab's bidding; and though on her were the signs of mourning, the real grief was in David's own heart.

David's favorite son, Absalom, was a fugitive for the murder of his brother; and David mourned in his palace both the absence of his heir and the wretched circumstances which had stained the record of his

family. Passion and murder had produced other passion and other murder in the royal household; and the young man Absalom, the king's heir and favorite, the idol of the court and of the people, had fled to a foreign city, a fratricide. David, meanwhile, was beset by conflicting feelings. His son was an outlaw; the avengers of blood ought to be on the track of the murderer; it might do great harm to the established order for Absalom to be forgiven. Yet, in spite of these considerations, the king mourned for Absalom. He longed to have his favorite back again. He was ready in his heart to excuse the young man's sin, but felt it to be his duty sternly to condemn that sin. So he was unhappy, as well he might be; and it was known to all the court how the monarch grieved over the banishment of his child.

At this juncture the brave but unscrupulous officer, Joab, determined to persuade the king to gratify his own inclinations. For this purpose he obtained the service of the wise woman from Tekoah, and we are shown in her interview with David the way in which she overcame his scruples and induced him to allow Absalom to return. She was well called a wise woman: for she led the king, before he was aware, to commit himself to the principle on which she wished him to act, and then she delicately applied the principle to his own case. She came as a suppliant, attired as a widow, and told a pitiable tale of her own misery. She said

she had had two sons, and that one of these, in a moment of anger, had slain his brother; and now the avengers of blood were on the murderer's track, and she would be deprived of her sole remaining child, and her husband's name and family would be blotted out of Israel forever. Let the king, she cried, make an exception in her case. Let the angry deed be forgotten, now that the anger was past. Let not her life be made more desolate by the punishment of her other, though guilty, son.

The king must have been startled by this request to do for another what he did not feel at liberty to do for himself. Perhaps he was glad to be able to indulge his mercy where no charge of favoritism could be brought against him. The pathetic plea of this woman made him feel also that there are times when mercy has a better claim than justice; and in another's case he could see this more clearly than in his own. We can always judge others better than we can ourselves. Let our circumstances be stated in the abstract, or in connection with some other name, and we can often more fairly estimate them than when we try to do so knowing them to be our own. David's sense of justice made him sternly put aside the thought of forgiving Absalom; but he readily granted to this supposed widow the boon she craved. "As the Lord liveth," he said, "there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth."



Now "the wise woman" proceeded to insinuate her main point into David's mind. We can see that she advanced slowly, feeling her way as she went; and with the appearance, at least, of much hesitation, only suggesting the matter to the king. She had two arguments to bring forward. On the one hand, why will not the king do as much for his own banished son as for hers? Was not Absalom the heir? Was he not the favorite of the people as well as of the king? Had he not been led to his crime by great provocation? If mercy seemed right to David in the case of her poor child, why should he be afraid to exercise it in the case of his own noble and best-loved son? Then, on the other hand, the wise woman clinched her argument by pointing David to the still better example of divine mercy. This, said she, is what God does. He knows that we all have in this life our only chance of recovery and salvation. Behold, we are all hastening to the grave,—we must needs die,—and then it is over with us; we shall be as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But does God let us thus perish? Does He steel His heart against His guilty children? Does He care not whether we are lost to Him or not? By no means, O king. God has devised means whereby His banished may not be expelled. He has pointed out a way of pardon; mercy and justice have been reconciled, and the law has not been dishonored, though the law-breakers have been

received back. "God . . . deviseth means, that he that is banished be not an outcast from Him."

It is nothing to us whether or not the wise woman of Tekoah was right in persuading David to restore Absalom. The incident remains no less an example of the triumph of mercy over justice, and of love over law; and, in the words by which she set forth the character of God and the fleeting chances of life, she speaks wisely to us as well as to King David. She comes as a shrewd observer; points us, in very graphic language, to a very true view of ourselves and of God; and while we may not have any such perplexing problem to solve as David had, we may need to have our common thoughts and habits brought into fresh contrast with the ways of the Most High.

There are two thoughts expressed in the text. The one is, that this life is man's only opportunity of receiving forgiveness: the other, that God has seized this opportunity and has devised means by which forgiveness may be secured.

In what a vigorous, yet pathetic, way did this wise woman of Tekoah set forth the "now or never" doctrine of life! "We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." Some think she meant to say that Amnon, whom Absalom slew, is now dead, and so he might as well be dismissed from thought. He had to die, anyhow; and since he cannot be restored, why

should we cherish resentment against the still living Absalom? But such a grim, immoral fatalism would scarcely have weighed much with King David. He was not the man to admit that there need be no repentance for the past, or that sin, once accomplished, need not be punished. It is evident, on the contrary, that the wise woman's words referred solely to Absalom. She meant to say that life is the only chance of forgiveness. Death was before them all; and who could say how soon it might come? And when it did come, then all hope of reconciliation between father and child, all hope of Absalom's repentance, all hope of amendment, would be gone forever. We are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up. Life has been given man for his salvation; death seals his glory or his doom.

Perhaps it may appear to some that this language goes even further, and implies a disbelief in any immortality at all. Were we to take the words alone and literally, this might be the case. The materialist would ask no more satisfactory illustration of what death is than this of water spilt upon the ground. Life, he would say, is but the bringing into organic connection of a certain number of particles of matter; and death is the parting and scattering of them. Death, he would say, literally ends all. The conscious life, like spilt water, cannot be regained. But we have no right to press thus the literal force of the wise woman's

figure, any more than to say that James did not believe in immortality when he likened life to a "vapor, that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away." Her language is to be understood only with reference to the opportunities and moral possibilities of life itself.

The thought which she uttered is one which especially abounds in the Old Testament,—that this life alone belongs to man to win his way, and do his work, and earn his reward. It is, for example, the thought of Job when he exclaimed: "The eye of him that hath seen me shall see me no more. . . . As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more"; or that of the Psalmist when he wrote: "Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise Thee? Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? and Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"; or that which the writer of Ecclesiastes still more vigorously proclaimed: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." In short, life is man's only opportunity. In it alone can we help each other; in it alone can we be reconciled to each other. In it alone, likewise, can we obtain the forgiveness of God. Surely no words, if this view of them be correct, could more forcibly express the idea than

these words of the text: "We . . . are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again."

Beyond doubt, the wise woman was right in saying that this is our only opportunity to bless, to win, to save our fellow-men. This was what she wished especially to impress on David's mind. He ought not to regard Absalom as already dead. Life is given for purposes of love and benefaction, not to be made, by stern anger, like to the grave. And in this respect she is clearly a good adviser to us all. What should impel us more to every kind of loving deed, what should impel us more to every effort for men's elevation and salvation, than the thought that soon they will be beyond our reach? We at least shall have lost our opportunity to help them. Their death will take them out of the range of our influence. While they live we may help them, but our arms cannot extend beyond the grave.

It is strange how often we forget this. One would almost think that a vague belief in purgatory lies latent in our minds, so often do we neglect men while they are alive and wish them well after they are dead. Commonly, this is due to either pride or carelessness. In fact, just as to the Hebrews, so to us this earth is intensely real and enjoyable. We want to make the most of it for ourselves while it lasts. So we are immersed in our own welfare and pursuits; we pass the needs of others by; we say too often, in effect,

"Wait till this fair scene has passed and we have had our joy and profit out of life, and then hereafter,—if there be one,—we will take up religion and benevolence." But, surely, this is trusting to a mere hope. It is well enough to have kind thoughts of the dead, even though in life they have been our enemies; but what does it profit them? The saddest of all thoughts is that of lost opportunities. There was one to whom I might have been more kind, whose heart I might have brightened, but, alas! now he is dead. There was one whom I might have turned to a pure and noble career; another, whose forgiveness I longed to ask; another, whom I ought to have forgiven; another still, to whom I might have carried the word of eternal life; but, alas! now they are all dead. I at least cannot help them now. Oh, if men would but think of this, how much gentler they would be in their judgments! how much quicker to forgive! and with how much more devotion would we not all strive to do without delay our share in the work of the world's salvation!

Can we carry the thought of the text farther, and say that as life offers the only opportunity men have to receive our aid and forgiveness, so it affords the only chance they have of receiving the forgiveness of God? If so, then the urgency of our duty is redoubled, and life is filled with responsibility otherwise unknown. I feel sure that this is so. When we remem-

ber the passages of Scripture already cited, in which the hopelessness of the grave is set in such marked contrast to the possibilities of life, we are prepared to hear the clearer words of the New Testament, "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." To this we add, "It is appointed unto men once to die; but after this the judgment." To that again we add the frequent descriptions of the judgment as based upon the deeds done "in the body." Even those who have not known Christ are represented by Him as accepted or rejected according as they have or have not acted well "unto one of the least of these my brethren." There is nowhere any hint that the judgment will go upon any other basis than the present life of man. Christ sent His disciples into the world, proclaiming forgiveness to every one that believes, and condemnation to all that refuse; and it would seem to follow that here is the place, and now is the time, in which mercy may be had.

You will refer me, perhaps, to those two much discussed texts in the First Epistle of Peter, which are thought by many to prove the contrary doctrine. The one reads, "For this cause was the Gospel preached even to the dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." The other relates that Christ in the Spirit preached to spirits in prison, that is, as the Apostle immediately explains, to the men

of old who were destroyed in the deluge. It is admitted, of course, that these passages are difficult to interpret. I can only express my honest opinion, reached in spite of much prejudice in favor of the other view. This is, that they do not teach the theory now so often drawn from them. When Peter said that "the Gospel was preached to the dead," he meant, I think, the dead saints and martyrs to whom the Gospel had come in their lifetime, but whom it had not saved from the pains of persecution and suffering. Some of his readers feared that these men had lost their reward; that they would not share in the coming kingdom. This was a common fear in those days. Paul exhorted the Thessalonians not to sorrow over their dead as those without hope, for the dead in Christ should at His coming rise first. So Peter assured his readers that the dead, though they had fallen under the fiery judgment of men, would live according to God in the spirit. As for the other passage, there is much to show that Peter meant simply that Christ by His Spirit had preached through Noah to the antediluvians; just as he says in another place that the Spirit of Christ testified in the prophets.

It remains certain, at least, that in the only two texts which can be quoted in favor of a probation after death, as much may be said against that interpretation as for it. It remains certain, moreover, that a dozen or score of other passages, about the meaning of which



there can be little doubt, bear directly against that theory. Finally, it is certain that these two texts,—even if they taught that Christ preached to the dead,—would teach that He did so between His death and His resurrection; and leave it still undetermined whether such preaching has ever been or is ever to be repeated. The Scriptural ground for expecting an opportunity for repentance after death, therefore, rests upon a doubtful inference from a doubtful interpretation of two difficult passages of the Bible. I submit that this cannot begin to outweigh the earnest appeal made throughout the Scriptures for repentance now in order to forgiveness.

We have little zeal indeed for the mere matter of fact. If it should turn out that any who have not received forgiveness here receive it in the other world, we should thank God a thousand times. But to trust to such an unlikely possibility is to drop over a precipice, upheld only by a single doubtful cord. It is to throw away certainty for the least possibility. Undoubtedly the great volume of Scripture teaching flows the other way. Our text is its fair representative. Death ends the day of forgiveness. We are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. Life is man's great and only chance. We can but repeat, over and over again, in the ear of careless men: Now is the accepted time. Ah, heed this wise woman of Tekoah. Stop hoping in vague and

unprofitable theories, and seize the certain duty which the present moment brings. Make life your opportunity. Do all your duty to your fellow-men now, ere death takes them from your reach! Take God's forgiveness now, while the golden chance is yours!

This leads us to the other truth expressed in the text. This is, that God has seized this opportunity of man's earthly life, and has devised means whereby man may be forgiven. The second half of the text should be translated: "God does not cast away a soul, but thinks thoughts in order that His outcast one may not be expelled from Him." The speaker clinched her appeal to David by reminding him of the mercy of God; and there was such a likeness between David's relation to Absalom and God's relation to David himself, that her appeal must have had much force. For God has His rebellious and disobedient sons. David himself had sorely needed the divine mercy. God's favorite child, so to speak,—the man after his heart,—had been guilty of the same crime as Absalom; and the king, grieving in loneliness over the sin of his favorite child, must have realized, as he never did before, how God felt toward him who was no less a sinner.

The likeness went further still. As the king felt that, however much he might wish to do so, he could not, for the sake of his kingdom and his own

authority, pardon the royal criminal; so likewise did he know that the law of God, just as sternly and more unchangeably, banished every sinner from the divine presence. Thus we are brought to face again the great problem of all time,—how shall the Father's love grant forgiveness to the son consistently with the Father's own authority? How shall the divine law, the law of the universal kingdom, be upheld while grace finds its way to the guilty? You see the same problem presented itself to David which is ever presenting itself to God, just as in David were united the two relations of father and king, which are united in God also, who is both our Father and our King. But what has God done in the circumstances? Has He thrown His government to the winds in order that His love may have its will? Or has He stifled His affection in order that His government may be respected? No, He has done neither. The wise woman put the truth in just the right way. He has "devised means" whereby both ends may be secured, and His banished not be expelled from Him forever.

There are some persons to whom the idea of a plan or scheme of salvation is repugnant. They think it a crude, human way of stating the truth. It seems to them impossible that God should seem to be compelled to resort to any device in order to save men. Why cannot He both grant pardon and uphold His authority without any such scheme? Is He, they ask,

a man, that He should be forced apparently to circumvent his own law in order to do His will ?

In reply it may be said that we cannot safely criticise facts, and that it is far more reasonable to suppose that the fact has a sufficient reason than to deny the fact because we cannot understand that reason. The wise woman of Tekoah used this language because she and the king had all around them examples of such devices. What else was that altar which smoked before the tabernacle on Mount Zion ; what else meant the law respecting leprosy and the cleansing which they had received from Moses ; what else were those cities of refuge, where the blood-avengers could not enter, than devices illustrative of the government of God ? These old Hebrews knew enough from their own religious system, which was itself an immense scheme, to make them realize that though they, like the rest of the world, were under the ban of God by nature, He had devised means by which they and others also might return to Him.

In like manner must we look upon the facts and the teachings of the New Testament. The mission and the death of Jesus are there called a mystery which was hid in God from the beginning. We are told that "in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, . . . to redeem them that were under the law." What was that if not a scheme, long delayed, but at the right moment put into execution ? We are told that "He

hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." What was that but a plan, involving the substitution of one for another? Finally, we read that God sent forth Christ in order "that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Here is certainly a device not to circumvent law, but to honor it, while at the same time forgiveness is provided for men.

Indeed, on any view of Jesus which at all admits Him to have been a divine messenger, we must suppose a plan or scheme in the mind of Him who sent Him; a plan, for example, that the world should wait so many years before Christ came; a plan that His coming should be prepared for among the Jews; a plan that by His death He should at least teach men the way of holiness. We go only a step further and say it was also a plan by which justice could be satisfied and atonement made. It is just like what God is ever doing in man's history. He does not bring about His ends at once, but slowly and painfully: by devices; by the use of means; by the slow unfolding and victory of His eternal purpose. God has a plan, or else the world would not be governed. He has a law, or else the world's order would not be upheld. So in the gift of Christ, of course, He had a plan, and has devised means whereby this race, banished by its sin, may be forgiven.

And what a device it is! We learn it at the cross. That sufferer was the Son of God. He laid His life down as a ransom; and from His death there come to us two words,—righteousness and love. The righteousness of God,—upheld, satisfied,—provided now for us all; the love of God, uttering from above that bleeding form, Come, for all things are now ready. Go out, then, to the Absaloms,—the guilty fugitives from heaven,—and tell them the good news that they need not be exiles any more! To that Absalom, who has stained his soul with vice and crime, carry the offer of forgiveness. He is feeding swine, it may be; but tell him he may come home. He is worse than a publican, perhaps; but let Him confess, and he may be justified. Carry the message to the sinful everywhere,—to the degraded and the desperate, as well as to the polished criminal, or the man whose heart is hard with avarice. Go whisper it in the ears of the timid and the doubting; let it ring in the market-place; proclaim it from the house-top; tell it to your friends, and take it for your own hope. Absalom is not lost. Absalom need not be an exile. Absalom can come home now, while his life is strong, ere the water is spilt upon the ground; for God has devised means whereby he may justly be forgiven!

Are there no Absaloms here? Are there none who feel themselves sinners,—banished from their Father

and King? Are there none who want to return home and seek their Father's face? I bring you His message,—Come. He has not given His Son to die without meaning what He says. He is in earnest, and you may take your place among His children. You may make life what it ought to be,—the road to heaven. Repent, and you shall be forgiven. Ask, and you shall receive. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. No one need be lost; for now, while the opportunity is here, God has devised the means of your salvation. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

## XIV

### JOHN THE BAPTIST

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias."—JOHN i. 23.

"He must increase, but I must decrease."—JOHN iii. 30.

BOTH these expressions fell from the lips of John the Baptist: the first, when "the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?"; the second, when certain of the Jews, led perhaps by his own disciples who were jealous of his honor, reported to him the growing popularity of Jesus and the prospect that he might be outshone by the new light whose rising he himself had announced. His words on both occasions give evidence of one of the most beautiful traits of character which any man can have. They show the entire absence in John of what in a popular way we may call self-consciousness; he lost himself in his work and in his Master. They show, as, indeed, his whole history does, that he thought not of his own reputation or fate, cared nothing for applause and was indifferent to danger; that he forgot himself, or else, with consummate grace, put himself entirely in the background in even his own thoughts, in order that nothing but the divine



message and the divine Messenger might be considered.

It is rather remarkable that this grace should appear so conspicuously in John the Baptist. He was a somewhat fierce reformer. His appearance was peculiar, and his personality attracted universal attention. He stood also single handed in the battle with traditional sin and established error. His position required great energy and courage, undoubting faith in his own call from God, iron-like power of endurance. Such a position is apt to make some men egotistical even when sincere. They readily become self-asserting. The very solitude of their position tends to make them self-conscious. But John was so great a man as to be above this temptation. He realized clearly that he was but an instrument in God's hand to do a special and temporary work. Into that work he threw himself with the zeal of a devotee. Therefore, he lost all thought of himself in thought of his work and office. Who he might be was a matter of absolutely no consequence to friend or foe. He was the voice of God. That was enough. That was all. And when his mission began to close, with sincere, indeed almost unconscious humility, he gloried in his lessening fame. Had he not spoken in order to introduce the Messiah? Should he then regret that the Messiah caused him to be forgotten? He was but the Bridegroom's friend, who stands and

hears Him, and rejoices greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice. Intense as was his nature, strong as was his courage, impressive as was his personality, John the Baptist appears most admirable and was most successful because of the complete self-forgetfulness with which he did his glorious task.

Such an example is fitted to teach us an important lesson. We are naturally prone to an exaggerated self-consciousness, even when we have the least reason for it; and sometimes our very efforts to do what we consider right unhappily increase this natural tendency. We are apt to spend our moral energy, for instance, in trying to force good feelings and strong religious emotions, instead of allowing these to regulate themselves; and, in consequence, we become painfully and morbidly absorbed in self-inspection. Or we seek to solve the mystery of life and to overcome incessantly suggested doubt until existence becomes little more than an intellectual riddle, with the difficulty of which we are oppressed, and by the incubus of which our practical usefulness is palsied. Or, again, we may waste time in analyzing our Christian experience in order to learn surely whether we are believers, and whether we are growing in grace; and by so doing are either cast into despair or exalted by pride. Of course, self-examination is not to be neglected, but it may be abused. A thoroughly healthy life is largely unconscious of its processes. It

is the sick man who realizes that he has a body. The perfectly well man gives it little thought. So in the moral and religious sphere, the best work is done in self-forgetfulness. The best progress in grace is made by those who are so absorbed in doing the duties commanded them that they think little about the effect upon themselves. The finest life is that which forgets its own needs in the joys of service; and while no man should fail at times to search his own heart, every man will be and do better by being absorbed in what is greater than himself than by being busied with the diagnosis of the state of his own soul.

Now I wish, at this time, to take the example of John the Baptist, as given us by these two expressions from his lips, and to show you how by beginning aright he grew unconsciously into the finest type of Christian manhood. He will suggest, I think, the line along which we all ought to advance.

Observe first that John began by forgetting himself in the work he had been sent to do and the cause whose champion he was. This was the spirit in which he began his ministry. For thirty years he had waited for the hour to come in which he was to lift his voice as a trumpet in Israel. He had lived as a Nazarite from his birth. He had dwelt in the desert. What thoughts had filled his mind we do not know. But we may suppose that thoughts of the speedy coming of the Messiah, the worldliness of the church, the degra-

dation of the nation, burned within his soul. He went forth at last in the spirit and power of Elias, inspired for this very work, breaking on the guilty nation as the Tishbite of old on Ahab's court, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." Out of what considerations did this absorption of self in his work which characterized John spring?

It came first from his knowledge that he was immediately called of God to the work. Had he taken it up of his own accord, his self-forgetfulness could not have been so complete. He would have felt it necessary to justify his course. But working as he did in obedience to a divine call, he felt that he was simply an instrument in the Lord's hand. What was he, to rebuke the learning of the scribes, and the righteousness of the Pharisees? Who was he, to antagonize the existing order and to assume the authority of a prophet? What good could he expect single handed to accomplish? But believing that he spoke a word which God had put into his mouth, he could utter it though none heard or though all heard. It would win its way because it was God's word. He would do his work because God was using him. It was, I apprehend, this knowledge that he was called by God to speak and act as he did, which, first of all, made John lose thought of self in the herculean task to which he was assigned.

Moreover, he realized that the work was infinitely more important than he was. He was but one of a multitude, and God might have chosen any other man to do the work. It was of little consequence what his fate might be or what his opinions were. But the work for which he was sent was momentous, both to Israel and to all mankind. The hour of the world's great crisis had come. The axe was to be laid at the root of the trees. He for Whom Israel had sighed and prayed through many centuries was about to appear, and Israel was not ready to receive Him. The Lamb of God, who was to take away the sin of the world, was on His way to the place of sacrifice. As the man who struck the bell of American liberty is forgotten and was nothing, but the sound went forth into all the land, so he who struck the hour of redemption was nothing, but the announcement itself was all. Such a work was of incalculable importance to Israel and to humanity. Men must be made to hear. They must be brought to their knees in repentance. Who he was that roused them mattered nothing. What they might do to him was of no consequence. But the work of awakening must be done, be the cost what it might.

Still, again, John realized that the time was short. Already the Messiah had been born. The time was ripe for His manifestation. The failure of Israel was sealed. The cry of the faithful few was despairing. Outside,

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the world was ready. The tyrant was in power, prepared to slay. The world was learning from Israel as it had never learned before, and was come to share widely in Israel's hope. There was no time to be lost, no time to argue, no time to polish discourses, no time to think of danger, no time to think of self. For, to crown all, John knew his own mission to be but a brief one. He was only to prepare for the Messiah. He was simply to open the gate for the King of Israel to enter. He was nothing but a herald. His work, therefore, could not last long. It would soon be over and be merged into the greater work of the Greater Master.

It was out of such considerations as these no doubt that John's self-forgetfulness sprang. The crisis was imminent, and he became unconscious even of the exertion he made in meeting it. In the realization of such a situation, the mind is lifted up above its common tenor. When rescuing a fellow-man from danger, we forget our own. When the fight closes thick around him, the soldier is unmindful of the awful peril in which he stands. Luther was more self-conscious than John the Baptist was, because, heroic though he was and manifestly raised up by Providence for his special work, he was yet not the simple instrument in God's hand which the son of Zacharias was. Yet Luther rose to something of the same self-forgetfulness when he declared that he

would go to the Diet of Worms though there were as many devils aiming at him as there were tiles on the roofs. John was less boastful and no less brave. He had no Elector behind him and no friends with him. He absolutely obliterated himself in the work which he was sent to do. He sought no glory and no comforts. He heeded neither the frown of the priests nor the wrath of the king. He simply and without hesitation did his given duty, and spoke the word which God had put into his mouth—anxious that men should listen to it rather than look at him—glad to be known as nothing but a voice—a voice from God, crying in the wilderness: "Behold, the King cometh; prepare ye the way of the Lord."

Now, in a way, the same motives which operated in John's mind can govern us, even though we are not specially raised up by God as he was. Every man has a divine mission in the world. It may be very humble, but it is a real mission. It may be quite out of the line of what we commonly call religious work, and yet be in the deepest sense a divine mission. Life is given us, at any rate, that we may serve God in it; and whatsoever our circumstances or our condition, we may serve Him if we have the will. He who has a willing heart and an open eye will discover the possibilities of service when others see them not. He will recognize in the needs of his fellow men a divine call. He will feel that he is part of a great organism in

which the Almighty is working out His will and plan, and that whatsoever makes truth clearer, or society purer, or human suffering less, or ignorance rarer, or holiness more dominant, is an agent for the fulfilment of that divine will. He will put at the forefront of all agencies the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and will think life used for the noblest end when contributing to the spread in the world and in society of that blessed truth.

Thus every one may catch the enthusiasm of application. Every one may feel in a measure the pressure of the same motives by which we have supposed that John was governed. Each man may feel himself called of God to be of use. Each ought to feel that the work is of infinitely more importance than he is; that the time is short in which to do it; and that at the best it will not be a long work, since our stay in the vineyard is but for a little while. So, grasping the situation, a true man ought, like John, to forget himself in these divine activities. We have no right to consider our own pleasure or even mainly our own spiritual profit. It matters little what becomes of us: but humanity must be comforted and redeemed, truth and God must be glorified. We are not to spend our whole time in purifying our hearts, or in mourning over our sorrows, or in cultivating our intellects. We are to go out of ourselves and give our time to purifying others' lives, to comforting others in their



sorrow, and to driving away ignorance from others' minds. Our vision should be directed outward, not inward. We should not deem ourselves to be of the chief worth.. That which should enlist us is the active service to which Providence obviously calls us. The consequence will be that through this self-forgetfulness our lives will become most useful and happy. Our sorrows will be best assuaged by sympathy with those of other men. Our knowledge will grow wider as we seek to give it to the ignorant, whereas he who lives for himself in any sense will become the poorer and more wretched for his pains. Surely, this is a needed lesson. Forget thyself in service for thy Master, if thou wouldst tread the noblest path in life.

But, important as it is, this is not enough, by any means, for the full ripening and perfecting of Christian character. There may be absorption in benevolent and useful work without any sense of personal relationship to Christ. If so, the necessary condition of real Christian growth is wanting. It is interesting, therefore, to notice the path by which, apparently, John the Baptist reached ripeness of character. The second passage, which I have chosen as part of the text, indicates what that path was.

The inevitable time came when his mission drew to a close. The Messiah, for whose advent he had been sent to prepare, came upon the scene and gradually

occupied a larger space than His herald in the thoughts of the people. The crowd which had attended on the ministry of the Baptist began to thin, while a greater multitude listened to the teaching of Jesus. Manifestly, John's day was nearly over. He would soon have to stand aside altogether, and in the gloom of a prison watch the better ministry of the Nazarene.

It was a proof of the sincerity of John's devotion to his God-given work that he so gracefully recognized the rightfulness of his own diminishing popularity. "He must increase; but I must decrease." John served so well that he was ready to pass into obscurity when his work was done. Not every man possesses such humility; and we cannot but consider it to have been the crowning beauty of this prophet's character that he not only forgot himself in his work, but also in its issue. He was ready both to subordinate himself to service and to serve so faithfully as to be willing to have his service itself forgotten in the success of Him whom he had come to serve.


But in this John did more than exhibit humility and loyalty. He exhibits the precise path along which Christian progress lies. I think we may fairly see a real growth in John's spiritual life. Beginning by consecration to the divine will, he finds that will to be submission to Jesus. Gradually Christ supplants in his mind even his God-given work. The person of Jesus

becomes the main object of his attention,—the sun in the heavens before which all the stars hide themselves. John learns now to subordinate himself to Christ as he had formerly subordinated himself to his work. He finds that he must trust Christ absolutely, for even he, prophet though he was, did not understand what Jesus was going to do. He finds that he must love Christ supremely, for in Him the final revelation of God was made. He must cease his own activity, because Christ must and can do all. He must lay aside his mission, for that of the Master has begun. He must hold in check his own hopes and fears, for Christ alone knows how redemption to Israel is to be brought about. All this growth in spiritual character is the appointed way for the prophet of the law to ripen into the Christian disciple; so that his words become significant not only of his humility and loyalty, but of the positively larger and more spiritual view of duty which he had attained, when he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

For Christian character ripens in just this way,—its progress toward perfection lies just along this line. It begins with faith in Jesus Christ as the Saviour and Master of our souls. But that is only the beginning. It grows in proportion as Christ becomes in us and to us more and more; and we, in conscious distinction from Him, become less and less. It ripens by the fusion of our motives with His purposes, our affections

with His spirit, until we are able in some measure to say with the apostle, It is not we that live but Christ that liveth in us. For we must have faith not only in Christianity as a system and life, but in Christ as a personal Redeemer.

Thus Christian growth consists in broadening the scope of our dependence on Christ, forgetting our own merits. As I have said, we in principle depend on Him when we first become disciples. But the experimental realization of what is involved in that principle unfolds as we go on. The disciple learns that in order to obtain salvation he is to trust absolutely in Jesus; that no works which he can do can merit life: so that after a long period of service he feels the nothingness of his own labor even more than he did at the beginning. He learns also that he must trust absolutely to Christ's wisdom in the orderings of Providence. He must depend upon Christ for guidance; for sanctification no less than for justification; for happiness no less than for pardon; for assurance as well as for cleansing. Thus trust grows in him, grows not only in power but in extent. Self-confidence diminishes because confidence in Christ increases. Pride dies at the feet of ripened faith. He decreases in the sense that self-dependence passes utterly and wholly away until not a remnant of it is left: whereas Christ increases in the sense that His all-sufficiency grows like the dawn upon the soul. At last the disciple is able to fathom



the meaning of the declaration that Christ has been made unto us of God wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

Then, too, Christian growth consists in the practical merging of the human will in the will of Christ, forgetting our own plans. It is here that our individuality most plainly appears. It is the human will which is the chief rebel against God. The refusal of the will to bow before Him is the root of sin. This is the self, the personality, which must be brought into living and practical unison with God or else be God's everlasting enemy. So the disciple learns to make his will more and more the expression of the mind of Christ. This is not to be done by force work. It is the effect of a new life. He learns to appreciate the divine beauty of Christ's character; the evident wisdom which dwelt in Jesus, and which now, as he believes, rules the world. His heart is won by the love of Jesus, so that under the Spirit's operation his affections become set on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Therefore his will ceases to be in opposition. It is no longer independent and self-reliant. It seeks to express not man's poor purposes and weak thoughts, but those of the Son of God.

Whatever, therefore, Christ commands, the disciple becomes willing to do; whatever Christ ordains, he becomes willing to bear; wherever Christ sends, he becomes willing to go. He can now raise with

more sincerity the prayer, "Thy will be done." He has decreased; Christ has increased. Christ, to use the apostle's phrase, becomes formed within him. A child will sometimes reproduce almost exactly the mind of his parent. He has inherited the latter's mental characteristics, to begin with; and then training and love and association have done the rest. When he becomes older, the child can often see his parent in himself, and be sensible that the latter has been formed within him. So, but more faithfully, ought the disciple to reproduce Christ. This will not destroy his own individuality, but perfect it. This will not weaken his energy, but direct it to the best issues. Nevertheless he will decrease, and Christ will increase in him. He will forget his own separate and selfish existence through joyous union with Him who is his hope of glory.

Thus Christian growth consists in Christ's becoming all in all to the disciple's consciousness. In Christ the disciple discovers a new revelation of God and of truth which is as vastly greater than his first view of the Saviour as the heavens, when seen through a telescope, are greater than when seen with the naked eye. In Christ he discovers also a sympathy and a patience, which appear more lovely and helpful than he ever dreamed such things could be. In Christ he finds himself complete,—and as his own thought deepens, as his own activities expand, as his own needs become

more manifest, he finds that thought attains its best results when in obedience to Christ, that activities do most good when guided by Christ, and that the deepest needs are amply met in Christ. He has received the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Christ: the eyes of his understanding being enlightened, so that he knows what is the hope of his calling and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints; until before the enthralled contemplation of the greatness of Christ he feels that his highest joy and blessedness consist in being the servant of such a Master and the lowly attendant of such a Lord.

Thus self reaches perfection best through self-abnegation. The believer learns to look wholly away from self to Christ. Through submission to the Master his own life grows in richness and power and peace. What as a self-dependent, independent person he had failed to obtain, he does obtain through dependence and trust. When most sensible of his weakness, he finds in Christ's strength that which secures to him the results that he desired, but could not win. Christ must increase, and the disciple must decrease, in order that the disciple himself may attain his own ideal. Self-forgetfulness is thus necessary to the disciple's growth. In proportion as he subordinates his own life to the Saviour's, will his life unfold its divine fruitage. The way of self-development in the spiritual

life is by self-abnegation. The starry crown is won by self-forgetfulness due to absorbed attention to Christ. He who loses his life is the one who gains it. The less we depend on self, the less we consult self, the less we think of self, and the more we depend on, and consult, and think of Jesus Christ, the faster will we grow into all that the sons of God should be. He must increase, and we must decrease.

John the Baptist exhibited growth in grace through self-forgetfulness in service and in faith; his self-forgetfulness in service ripening into self-forgetfulness through faith in Christ; the latter also, in substance, being the principal mainspring of the former. I commend this truth to you, Christian people, as the secret of power and peace in your Christian living. Ourselves are our worst enemies. We give them commonly too much attention. We think too much of their comfort and pleasure, and, beyond this, we waste too much time in foolish efforts to make ourselves better and happier. Let us forget ourselves. Let us look without us. Let us see the work of God which needs to be done, and busy ourselves with doing it, wheresoever it may lie, at home or abroad. Let us grasp the fullness of Christ and trust Him to make us better and to make us happy in His own good time and way. We shall have hardly escaped from the thralldom of self before we shall have found in the



larger life of service and of faith the beginning of the reward.

I commend this truth with no less earnestness to the people of the world. You are the slaves of selfishness. I do not mean that you may not be in a degree generous and kindly. But the dominant principle of your life,—what is it? Is it not self-interest? This slavery to money, and to fashion, and to pleasure—are they not various forms of self-worship? Trying thus to save your lives, you lose them. You lose all greatness from them; you lose the satisfaction which might pervade them; you lose the glory which ought to adorn them. And if perhaps your consciences have been quickened, you propose to win salvation by your works, little thinking how insufficient they are for such a purpose. Do you not see, to-day, your serious mistake? You must accept a better master than your own poor thoughts. You must confess your impotence and rely upon the Saviour. You must uncrown self and enthrone the Son of God. It is your only hope; for if you are self-good and self-serving, you will be self-destroyed. He who forgets himself in life's great work and then in life's Great Saviour, has himself found life for evermore.

## XV

### SIMON PETER'S BROTHER

"Andrew, Simon Peter's brother."—JOHN i. 40.

THERE are many very useful people in the world who are not appreciated, because they are overshadowed by some one especially conspicuous. They are dwarfed by comparison with a giant. They are forgotten because the attention of men is fixed on the greater one near them. They are like tall trees and huge rocks on a mountain's side: tall and huge though they be, they look small by contrast with the great peak itself. Such people may be really useful, worthy of study and imitation; their lives may be terrible tragedies; the pathos of their existences may be unutterable; or the value of their work may be actually more than that of another who towers over them: but by reason of the latter's nearness they are passed by without notice. We are often quite arbitrary in the selection of our models and heroes. We confine our admiration to a few whom, indeed, it is scarcely possible to imitate, while scores of others present excellences which are not less worthy of praise, and which may be more nearly within our reach. They are cast into the shade, however, by

the more conspicuous object near which it is their fortune to be.

We may apply these remarks to the apostle Andrew; and our text suggests the reason for his moderate renown. He was Simon Peter's brother. He was more distinguished, therefore, by his connection with Simon than by what he was or did. No figure stands out more prominently in the annals of the early Church than that of Peter. How often his name is mentioned in the Gospels! How much we hear of him in the earlier part of the book of Acts! What a great number of precious practical lessons has he been the means of our learning! What a mighty character was his,—that Luther of the apostolic age,—towering, as Luther did, above all but a few of his fellow Christians! But the very fact that to distinguish Andrew more clearly it was easiest to call him Simon Peter's brother, has tended to obscure the merit of the less renowned disciple. He is presented to us in the Gospel history in the shadow of his brother's giant shape. This puts him at a disadvantage. Not that Christian historians have been wrong in their estimate of the two—Peter was the greater; but that Christ, by choosing Andrew also to the apostleship, recognized his worth, where history has scarcely done so. He is a fair type, we doubt not, of multitudes of useful people whose worth is unrecognized because men either see or

are looking for some one of very extraordinary characteristics.

Now it is true that we know but little of Simon Peter's brother. We do not know which was the older of the two. We are informed that their home was Bethsaida of Galilee, which seems to have been a town on the Sea of Galilee not far from Capernaum. We hear of Andrew first as one of the disciples of John the Baptist, and as one of those who heard the great preacher say, as he pointed to Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God!" That testimony to Jesus as the Christ was enough for Andrew and his fellow disciple John. They followed Jesus, made His acquaintance, and abode with Him that day. Andrew thenceforth ranked himself as a believer in Jesus of Nazareth; and on the very day of his own acceptance of Jesus, brought his brother Simon Peter to the Master.

Thereafter we hear of this apostle on only four occasions: When the Galilean ministry of Jesus was beginning, He called these men, whose faith He had already won, to be His constant followers; and He marked their call by the miraculous draught of fishes, which symbolized so well the task to which He was calling them and the power by which He would give them success. We are told that Andrew, as well as Peter, obeyed the summons, left all, and followed Jesus, in order to be a "fisher of men." When, again, the public minis-

try of Jesus was about half finished, He performed on the east shore of the Sea of Galilee that wonderful act of feeding, from a few loaves and fishes, five thousand men. St. John, whose clear memory often appears in such particulars as this, tells us that when the disciples were asked by Jesus how that vast multitude could be fed, Andrew replied, with a vague feeling, I suppose, that, absurd as the provision seemed, it might be a help, or at least a starting-point, for other supplies: "There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes; but what are they among so many?" Again, when the ministry of Jesus was nearing its close, certain Greeks wished to see the new Messiah, and applied to Philip. Philip consulted Andrew, and together Andrew and Philip told Jesus. And, finally, when Christ gave on Mount Olivet to a few disciples that solemn prediction of the future,—of the fall of Jerusalem, and the troubles and persecutions which were impending, and of the end of the world itself,—we read not only that Peter and John and James were present,—those three whom so often Jesus took into special confidence,—but also that Andrew shared on this occasion the sad privilege of listening to the terrible prophecy.

With these few items our knowledge of the apostle Andrew ends. It is noteworthy that St. John, with whom Andrew first found the Saviour, tells us the most that we know of Simon Peter's brother. It is

noteworthy, also, that Andrew and Philip are often mentioned in a way which seems to indicate that they were intimate friends. Perhaps there was more congeniality between the two friends than between the two brothers. Andrew, cast into the shade by Peter, naturally strengthened his friendship with Philip, who was more nearly on his own level. Our knowledge of the man, however, is but small. We do not wonder that he should be distinguished from other Andrews by being called Simon Peter's brother. It is true that he was more renowned for his brother than for himself. Quite sharp is the contrast between the quick-tongued, energetic, commanding Peter, whose name is strewn thickly on the pages of the Gospels, and the brother, whose name occurs so seldom, and then apparently in the most incidental way.

But, in spite of all this, it would be a great mistake to slight Andrew and to think that he was of no value in the apostolic circle. Let us look a little more closely into these glimpses of his life. Let us try to estimate the real merit of the man. We should remember that in general Andrew was, from first to last, faithful to the voice of God. He was one of the disciples of John the Baptist, and that means that he was a loyal, earnest son of Israel; a man of spiritual mind, who heard in the words of the great preacher a message from Almighty God. Nor did he, like so many, follow John the Baptist in a blind, unintelligent way. He

believed him to be, as John himself said, the herald of the Messiah. Few of the people understood the mission of John; but Andrew did, and he proved the fact by leaving the Baptist and joining himself to Jesus when the prophet pointed the latter out as the promised Christ. From that day forward Andrew was faithful to the true Light which had arisen. Though not conspicuous, he was devoted; though taking no prominent place, he was a faithful follower. If no great confession or service is told of him, so neither is any great failure or denial. At the Lord's command he, too, left all and followed Him. When the perils of the way increased, Andrew stood his ground firmly. Because nothing noteworthy is related, we should not forget that he was a faithful worker. So far, at least, he was a type of the true disciple. We should bear in mind that of necessity there must be many more Andrews than Simon Peters, more captains than generals in the army, and that the fidelity of the former may be as worthy of praise as the brilliant acts of the latter. Andrew became a type of the multitude of believers who are not called to conspicuous posts, but on whose loyalty the cause of Christ depends, and in whose ripening Christian characters we may see the grace of the Divine Spirit quite as markedly as in the shining qualities of the few who are so often marked by equally evident faults.

I see, also, indications of certain distinctive qualities

in Andrew which more particularly merit our commendation. He seems to have had an active, alert mind, eagerly watchful of the course of events, and to have felt their tremendous importance. He seems to have been a wide-awake, useful man of work; if not as ready as Peter to speak in public, quite as ready to speak for Christ in private; always glad to do what he could by personal toil to advance the Master's cause. I imagine him a man of quick observation and of an inquiring mind, as well as of true spiritual fervor. You may have noticed in some men of obscure lives nearly all the qualities which seem necessary for public position—clear judgment, deep conviction, fertility of resources, power to influence others—while yet some one defect of trifling nature, such as hesitation to act, reticence of speech, or the like, may doom them always to be lost in the crowd. Perhaps it was so with the apostle Andrew. At any rate, he was the means of his greater brother's conversion. If Peter overshadowed Andrew, Andrew brought Peter to Jesus. No sooner had he found the Christ himself than he told the discovery to his brother. He began his Christian life in the right way. He immediately became a missionary; and, first of all, a missionary to his own family, which most men find it hard to be. Many would rather preach to the heathen than to their brothers. Andrew did the latter, and thereby showed one of the traits of his character.

Then take that other incident, to which I have



already alluded, when the five thousand were fed. It was Andrew who was ready with a practical suggestion. He had been on the outskirts of the crowd. While the five loaves and two fishes seemed an absurd provision for that great multitude, one cannot help believing that Andrew was convinced that Christ could make some use of them. He seems to me to have been a practical worker—a man who, if he could not make an address, could be on the alert for opportunities of helping, in a quiet way, the Master's object. He could not help exclaiming, as he told Christ of the five loaves and two small fishes, "What are these among so many?" And yet the fact that he thought them worth mention at all indicates that he had a strong faith in the unlimited power of Jesus. Did he not remember that draught of fishes in the Sea of Galilee after they had toiled all night and taken nothing? Andrew, with his practical mind, was alive to the worth of even small materials when put into the hands of the Son of God.

Then, also, shall we see nothing to commend in the way in which Andrew and Philip tell Jesus of the desire of the Greeks to see Him? I find in that incident a repetition of the characteristic which Andrew had showed at the first. He is the man who quietly and by personal efforts brings men to Jesus. Some of the disciples would have hesitated to introduce foreigners to Christ. They would, perhaps, have rejected the notion that the Messiah was sent to the Gentiles,




or at least would have feared the possible effect on the populace of throwing Christ into association with outsiders. Philip was undecided what to do till he had consulted Andrew. But the latter seems to have better understood his Master. He felt that Jesus would be glad to help and save any ; and it was just in the line of his habits to be thus the medium of leading inquiring minds to the Saviour of them all.

I think then that Peter's shadow is somewhat removed from his brother. Andrew now appears a faithful, useful man, doing good work in a quiet way, even in advance of Peter in practical suggestions and, perhaps, in the understanding of Christ's mission ; not fitted, indeed, to fill his brother's place, not the man to stand up at Pentecost and preach to thousands, but the man to add by constant, personal, practical work to the power of the common cause. Every Simon Peter needs an Andrew, every preacher needs the practical workers to unite with him, just as every general needs subordinate officers. If Andrew be undervalued because of his brother's brilliancy and publicity, he will not be when we remember how little the latter could have done, humanly speaking, without the aid of the former. Beyond doubt the Master's choice was good. Simon Peter's brother was as useful in his way and as truly an apostle as Simon Peter himself. We admit that the latter was the greater man of the two ; but we contend that it

would be quite unfair to let his splendor throw too much into the shadow the practical, useful, faithful life of Andrew, his brother.

Now there are two or three lessons which I wish to draw from the life of the apostle Andrew: One is the folly of measuring our use and worth by comparison with the other people who are about us. There is no more frequent cause of discontent than this. Nearly every one finds himself, or thinks he is, overshadowed by some one else. Very few rise to conspicuous places. Very few attract the special notice of the world. Many, however, fret under the situation. They do not like to be relegated to obscurity. They fancy that they are worth nothing and can be of no use, because they are not worth so much or are not so useful as others whom they know. Strangely, too, this is a frequent fault with good people. They have a real desire to be of use to God and men. They feel that life is a service; that in one sense all are apostles, sent of God with His message of love and salvation to the world. But the little that it is possible for them to accomplish in the world causes discouragement. Others do more than they, or seem to be doing more; and they fall into the unhappy habit of "measuring themselves by themselves, and of comparing themselves among themselves"—of estimating their worth by comparison with those about them. So they deepen their discontent.



Yet surely nothing is more foolish and more superficial than this. Such an estimate is nowhere considered worth anything. As we look over history, and try to measure the worth of this and that character, we always feel that so long as we confine ourselves to their particular circumstances we have the materials for only a relative and not an absolute estimate. We see some overshadowed, as Andrew was and as we may be, by the presence of a few exceptional persons. They are born in an age of great men. They are thrown into near relation, either of time or place, with an illustrious man, and by reason of that fact they do not receive their full award of praise. Others, on the contrary, are born in an age of little men: and though they themselves be small, yet an inch or two of height above that of their fellows would not be a fair reason for classing them with the great of a really great age. In that splendid burst of dramatic poetry which marked the reign of Elizabeth in England, there were many men of genius whose reputation, except to students of literature, has been overshadowed by their nearness to Shakespeare. Some one has said,—perhaps not with accuracy, but the remark illustrates our point,—that “it was fortunate for Cromwell that he appeared upon the stage at the precise moment when the people were tired of kings; and unfortunate for his son Richard that he had to make good his pretensions at a

moment when the people were equally tired of protectors." However that may have been, other names will occur to us of men who became famous because they lived when there were none to eclipse their fame; though if they had belonged to a later period they would soon have been forgotten.

We may see others, also, who are overshadowed, not by persons, but by circumstances. Some have hard tasks, and because they do not succeed perfectly they may be undervalued. Others are successful, but deserve little praise because their task was easy. In none of these cases would an estimate be fair which was based only upon comparison with contemporaries. The just critic tries to make allowance for these facts. He who has been obscured by the nearness of a stronger light may reflect that otherwise he would shine brightly too, like the stars at night. And sometimes we find on examination that, like the stars, he may be really greater even than the nearer sun which hides his light from the eyes of men.

We must not make this mistake in our own cases. It is folly to compare ourselves thus with those about us. We shall be sure to find ourselves excelled. We shall be sure to find ourselves hidden by the shadow of a larger figure; and if once we begin such comparison, we shall be doomed to discontent. The vigor of our life will wane. God does not judge us so. He knows our absolute worth. Christ chose

Andrew no less than Peter. He saw his worth, He appreciated his character, He made him useful. To Christ the Master, therefore, are we to look, going each the way which He has appointed, never saying, "Lord, what shall this man do?" but "What wilt Thou have me to do?"—content through knowing that in His eyes our desire to serve Him will never be unseen or unrewarded. What if others seem to excel us? It is not for us to make such comparisons. Christ will know whether we are doing our work well or not.

Then, also, we may be reminded by Simon Peter's brother of the great positive need which every cause has of quiet, inconspicuous, but faithful workers. Is it not suggestive of this that so few of the apostles should have left their mark upon the history of the Church or on the record in the New Testament? Were they not called to the post of highest honor possible for man? Was not their work the grandest that men have ever been commissioned to perform? And is there any reason to think that, except Judas Iscariot, they were unfaithful? Yet how little do we know of most of them! Only a few were meant to leave behind them not only permanent but visible effects. The rest scattered and toiled on till death called them to their reward. They started missions here and there; they witnessed for Christ and the resurrection. They were none the

less necessary, none the less useful, for having been forgotten. Certainly, it is true in secular affairs that the inconspicuous people do the bulk of the world's work. A few may lead; and it may be that but for them the mass would go astray. But the quiet workers achieve the principal results. The private soldiers win the battle. The workmen make the goods. The miners dig out the ore. And the progress of human society is due not merely to the genius of the few, but also to the work and faithfulness of the unknown many.

Thus Andrew becomes an encouragement to us, and particularly in respect to that moral and religious toil which God has apportioned to every one. He suggests the power of personal work and influence exerted in quiet ways. We recall how he brought his brother Simon Peter to Jesus, saying, "We have found the Messiah"; and then how he made himself the willing medium through which even Gentiles could approach the Saviour of the world. Now there is an amount of usefulness possible in this way which can scarcely be overstated. Personal influence is a great force, more irresistible than eloquence or formal authority; and yet it is a force which depends only on character,—yea, may sometimes issue unconsciously, and even from a child. Men may yield assent to argument or eloquence, but a word from one whom they love or admire will do

far more to fix their faith. You do not need to be conspicuous in order to be useful, so long as you can reach men individually; can throw the weight of your personal life and character for God and His Son: so long as you can stand in your place, whatever it be, and convince men that you are a Christian: so long as you can go here and there on errands of love and of salvation, telling the needy of the riches of God's grace, saying to one and another of your fellow men, "We have found the Christ."

Assuredly, this is a great lesson. What Christianity needs, in order to her speedier success, is not better arguments, not more elaborate churches, not eloquence, not genius, not more Peters and Pauls and Johns. She needs all of her humbler disciples to give themselves, in their humble spheres, to the work, as far as in them lies, of saving souls. She needs the rank and file of her legions to do their individual duty. Men easily come to think that the ministry and the formal servants of the Church are the only agents whom Christ has chosen. It is a great mistake. Every one of us, by the power of quiet personal work, may, like Andrew, be worthy of a place among apostles.

Truly, as we look over the annals of human progress under the Gospel, we are forced again and again to confess the usefulness of thousands of whom the world has heard but little. You could probably count upon



your fingers the names of those whom you call the chief defenders of Christ's cause in our age. But you forget. Think of the hundreds who are quietly teaching and preaching Christ in every heathen nation; think of the ten thousands who, week by week, throughout Christendom, are telling the children of the Saviour. Think of the millions who are giving their prayers, their money, and their influence to the cause of the kingdom. And you will see that the real power which is winning the world for God lies in just these countless quiet, unknown people, who are working together, though to each other unknown, for the name of the one Lord. These are the Andrews of our day—hidden, perhaps, as the apostle was, by the brighter blaze of a few or of one, but from Christ's sight not hidden, in Christ's view most useful, and destined not to fail of a reward. Did He not put the apostles on an equality? "Ye shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," said He. Andrew then shall have his true position, and it will be as glorious, as honorable as Simon Peter's own.

Our lesson, therefore, is, Do not be discouraged by the greater fame, the more brilliant success of others. Do not mind if you are overshadowed. You will not mind, if you are living not for this world's applause, but for the praise of Christ and for doing right. Believe me, Christ has given you a great work,



great possibilities, great chances of being useful. You have only to go to work, day by day. Remember your calling. Think no man unworthy of your effort. Be on the alert for opportunities. Do your own work, help and save your own friends, make your own influence what it ought to be, and do not care one whit whether men are looking at you or at some more shining figure. Thank God that you have not Peter's perils and temptations. Thank Him for what you are enabled in your quieter life to do, and do it with your might; for no man need be useless, and no man need fail, unless he choose to, of gaining from Christ a crown and a throne.



## XVI

### A NOBLE LIFE

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."—2 TIMOTHY iv. 6, 7.

WE learn some of our best lessons from the death-hours of our fellow-men. The voice which is already almost a voice from the grave strikes into our very souls. Or even if the dying lips give no utterance, our minds fancy that we can hear what they would speak. At such a moment we are forced to moralize. We see the ways of life converging; results revealing the value of principles; hope turning into retrospect. The moral naturally comes out at the end of the story; and even the fastest runners in the common race are forced to pause and think when one by their side falls into the dust, and by the mere fact of dying becomes a teacher of the living. By the graves of the righteous we instinctively cry with Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." And even the most careless feel, for at least a moment, the wrong of sin and the worth of godliness.

Thus the great apostle gave as his last legacy to

Timothy the splendid moral of his own life. He is an old man writing to a young man. He feels himself virtually dead. "Already," he says, "I am being offered." All hope of further work was ended. His martyrdom was certain. He was lying in a Roman prison. No doubt he was already actually sentenced. At any rate, he had given up all expectation of release. He felt like a victim laid upon the altar, and seemed to see the glittering knife uplifted to slay him. Therefore he wrote to his beloved friend and spiritual son with perfect freedom.

There is no coarse egotism in this frank expression of satisfaction with his life. He was prompted to write as he did, no doubt, by several considerations. Timothy was his intimate companion, and he could speak to him as a father to a son. Timothy, moreover, was still in the midst of the battle, and needed the encouragement which the peace and joy of his dying father were likely to impart. Then, too, Paul felt himself to be a representative man. He stood for the Gospel to the Gentiles. He had been bitterly assailed, even by those who should have been his friends. He had suffered for his faith the loss of all worldly goods. His life had, indeed, been a battle with poverty, with persecution, with falsehood and wrong, as well as with indwelling sin. He naturally spoke, therefore, in his dying hour in the name of his faith. He would support it with his last

breath. He would testify to its worth at that moment when all things are tested. He would certify to the absence of even the least shadow of regret as he reviewed the way which had begun with the renunciation of early ambitions, which had been thorny, and bloody, and tortuous, and which was now ending in a violent death. Hence, I suppose, the freedom of his speech. Hence this full expression of satisfaction as he reviewed the past. He was not moved by any wish to be canonized as a saint. He was simply full of gratitude to the gracious Lord who had saved and used him. He gave his dying testimony that Timothy and all men might receive a fresh impulse to follow, as he had done, in the footsteps of the Son of God.

Behold, then, Paul's readiness to die. The strife was over with him. The appointed hour had come. He looks back and he looks forward, and if in the future he can see, like a star in the night, the glittering crown which God had promised, he can see, too, in the past, manifold sources of satisfaction; and as he lies on the altar, he can feel that he has not lived and toiled in vain.

I ask you to notice his three sources of satisfaction as he reviewed his life. We may glean from them how our lives ought to be viewed by us, and how we may live so as to die with the shining crown in sight.

He rejoiced, then, that he had "fought the good fight." There was no doubt that he had been a

warrior and his life a battle. From the hour of his conversion he had been in armor, his shield scarcely ever lowered, and his sword scarcely ever in the scabbard. He had contended with the tremendous power of old tradition, of family and racial prejudice, so that his own people had branded him with the name of traitor and renegade. He had contended with misfortune. In spite of poverty he had carried on his mission, working with his own hands for self-support. In spite of a score of physical evils,—shipwreck, persecution, bodily sickness,—he had kept to his chosen task. He had contended, likewise, against many errors which threatened to spoil or undo the work of his life; he had fought the haughty power of philosophy, the tyranny of mobs, and the displeasure of princes. He had led the attack of a new religion against the strongly intrenched forces of ancient superstitions; had assaulted the favorite passions of the human heart; had charged against the old gods and their worship, and had given them their death-blow. Whatever may be our valuation of Paul's work, no doubt he was a warrior in the battlefield of mind and society. He was a controversialist; he was a missionary; he was plainly declared, by his sufferings, to be, in the view of the world, the active enemy of its pleasures. According to his own graphic description, his lot had been cast "in labors more abundant, in strifes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft."

Wounded, bruised, captured, condemned to die,—he could at least say with truth that his life had been a battle.

But I beg you to notice that his satisfaction did not arise from the mere excitement and pleasure of the war, nor from the consciousness that he had conducted himself well. There are some who love fighting for its own sake. They enjoy a controversy. Their spirits rise with danger. They are happiest when they don their intellectual armor and enter the field. And some, I suppose, even congratulate themselves, when life is ending, that they have contended so well. They count their laurels. They relate with pride how they worsted some competitor in debate or in business; how they shrewdly circumvented some fellow-man. They look at life as nothing but a battle, and, like some old soldier, live over in their age the fierce encounters of bygone days. It is hard, however, to have much admiration for such a spectacle. That a dying man should not be a man of peace is almost horrible. Even on actual fields of blood, dying enemies clasp hands and enter the other world friends. I would not like to imagine the apostle flushing in his last moments with the remembrance of his valor. It was not this which made him glad. Our common translation misinterprets him. He did not say, "I have fought a good fight," as though his fighting qualities were the source of his satisfaction. He said,



"I have fought the good fight." He rejoices not in his own bravery, but in the justice of his cause. He had not been fighting for self, or money, or office. He had been a warrior indeed,—but for truth and righteousness. He had been contending against sin,—in the world and in his own soul. He had been privileged to range himself with goodness and truth in their conflict with vice and error. This was his first source of satisfaction as he reviewed his life. Forced to fight, he had fought on the right side. Covered with wounds, every one of them was a mark of his loyalty to God. He was glad that he had fought the good fight; that, in a world of conflict, he had by divine grace given all his power to the side of God, and truth, and righteousness. This was quite another spirit from that of an aged warrior telling over the battles of his youth.

Now, it is almost too trite to say that life must be a battle, if it is to result in anything worthy of remembrance. Every man finds it so, unless he is content to go down to an unhonored grave. It is a struggle for existence, to say no more. Most men have to win their daily bread,—struggling against the temptations to indolence, perhaps against misfortune, certainly struggling against the lawful competition of others. It is in such a struggle that ordinarily industry, perseverance, courage, and training capture the spoils. But then, too, life is a struggle the more fierce

in proportion as the coveted prize is nobler than bread and raiment. One must needs fight like a Spartan for the honors of the world; endure the hardship of many a long campaign before a fortune has been gathered. There are now and then men born to crowns and millions, but they are simply enjoying the fruits of the conflicts which their fathers waged. The natural drift of things is against our pleasure. The body is always wearing out, and money is always taking wings, and honors are always being forgotten, and work is always being surpassed. We have only to stand still in order to perish; and, therefore, life calls for all the diligence and perseverance, all the tenacity of purpose, and self-control, and patient industry which we can acquire.

I might profitably enlarge upon this. There are many to whom this seems the most important lesson. No man can play with vice without endangering his honor. Vice, ignorance, idleness,—whatever enfeebles the hand and brain, or tempts a man from his place in the ranks,—must be sternly overcome by those of us who would make our lives worth living. But this is not the lesson taught by Paul. Many a man has had all the qualities of success and has succeeded, and yet when his death-hour came, has bitterly felt that the prize was not worth the struggle. The apostle taught that there are some things worthier our struggle than all else, and that satisfaction will

come if we can feel that for these things we have contended. There is one fight going on all the time, which is called, by preëminence, "the good fight." It is the copy in our world of the struggle of the angel powers themselves. It is the battle of light with darkness. It is the gigantic effort of the human soul, under the influence of God, to overcome its lusts, to cleanse its abode of the shames and wrongs which foul them. It is the struggle of the mind to shake off the fetters of ignorance and slavish fear, and to come out into the sunlight of God's truth.

For a man to be captivated by the mere struggle for existence, or for pleasure and comfort, is for him to say virtually he has no soul. If he had, he would feel that the fight which demands his life is that between God and the devil. Its forms are many, its phases innumerable. But in them all there is the conflict of but two principles,—of evil against duty, of moral slavery against freedom, of sin against righteousness, of ignorance and error against knowledge and truth. The greatest source of satisfaction will be that we have enlisted in this war, and that we have fought for God. We may have had humble positions; we may have received many wounds and falls; we may have won few victories; we may have lived but a few years; but we have done what we could, and our lives have been a contention not for selfish enjoyment, but for the advancement, in

some way and in some relation, of the kingdom of divine peace. Fellow-men, you cannot escape conflict. Why not then battle for what is right? You cannot escape wounds. Why not receive wounds of honor? We must work, and toil, and suffer. Why not do it for a cause which will give us the satisfaction of knowing that, whether of great or little use, we have at least thrown our energies into "the good fight"?

But note the apostle's second cause of satisfaction in his review of his life. "I have finished the course." What course? we may ask. Clearly, the course appointed him by God. It was now finished. He had reached the goal. And he felt satisfaction in the thought, not so much that it was over, as that he had submitted to the will of Him who had directed his way.

Paul was a conspicuous example of a man whose life had been chosen for him by God. Certainly, the course along which he had come was one of which, in the beginning, he had never dreamed. He had chosen to become the valorous champion of Judaism. God chose him to be the champion of the faith against which Judaism waged war. When this direction had been given to his steps, he would fain have chosen to preach to his own people whom he had zealously misled. But God chose him to be His messenger to the Gentiles, and in that work his movements were singularly directed from above. It was

the Spirit who said in Antioch, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." It was the Spirit who hindered his laboring in Ephesus until he had first carried the Gospel to Macedonia and Greece. It was the choice of the Master that through the persecution of his countrymen he should be carried to Rome and enabled by his very imprisonment to tell of Christ to Cæsar's household. If ever a man had reason to feel himself God's instrument, it was Paul. If ever a man had reason to feel that nothing had come to him by chance, but all by divine appointment, it was Paul. He did so feel. He was impressed with the conviction that he was God's instrument; that he had been raised up for a purpose; that his had been a course marked out by the decree of the Almighty in order to the salvation of mankind.

Therefore, in his last hours, looking back upon the way, he enjoyed the satisfaction of knowing that his life had been God's handiwork, and that he had fulfilled the divine will. Mark, that he could have this feeling even though conscious of many shortcomings. No man was ever less conceited than Paul. So far as his personal character was concerned, he was always ready to condemn himself. The bitter remembrance of his early life was ever uprooting the least tendency to pride; and the sense of ill desert was repeatedly expressed. To this same Timothy he had but lately called himself "the chief of sinners."

Nor did the apostle mean to say that he had done for Christ all the work he would like to have done. There were regions which he had not visited. There were millions of souls who had never heard of redemption. He was far from wishing, I doubt not, to retire from the ministry. His was too great a soul not to lay plans which it was impossible to accomplish.

His feeling was simply that what he had been able to do was what had been appointed him to do. God had meant him to do so much and no more. He included in his review of his course all events which had befallen him. He included his sufferings, his losses, his disappointments, his omissions, as well as his personal labors and gains. He was but an instrument. The work which he had not been able to do others would accomplish. Every good man's life fits into its intended place, and Paul's joy was that he had been made willing both to do and to suffer according to the will of God.

According to this, life is an appointment. We must not allow this view to degenerate into fatalism. We must not make it an excuse for idly drifting with the current of circumstances. No man was ever so strong a predestinarian and, at the same time, so energetic a worker as Paul. The view of life as a divine appointment in all its parts, which he has taught, is rather a summons to do with all our might

the will of God. It is the appointment of freemen, not the bondage of slaves. But with this caution, we may find in it a grand secret of strength and of true success. How inspiring is the thought that this intricate system which we call society, this infinitely involved life of humanity, is working out the purpose of the One in whom the whole lives and moves and has its being! If so, then true success consists in doing the part assigned us. The best workman in a factory is not one who tries to do everything, who thinks he knows everything, but the one who does his own work perfectly. A complete life is one which has done its own work. You who are young know not what your part is to be. It may involve great suffering, or it may involve great wealth. We cannot tell. But whatever it involves, it is part of the divine plan, and if we are God's, it will work out our own good.

Therefore, he is the wisest man who goes into life with the conviction that he has something definite to do there, and makes it his business to follow, as best he can, the indications of Providence. True, God does not send us our orders as a general sends his to his soldiers. But He has given us plain directions about the principles to govern life, and His Providence supplies the material to which we are to apply them. The noblest life is not that which seeks to do its own will, neither is it that which indolently waits for God

to do His will with it. The noblest life is that which strives to do His will. This means the greatest consecrated resignation in its place, and patience in its place, and industry in its place, and joy and peace in all places; and, through all, it means a living faith—not merely faith in the past or in the future, but faith in the present as the manifestation of God's wisdom.

It is this faith which makes a man work while it is called to-day—"not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord"—and which also makes him take reverses without despair, and afflictions without doubting, and meet death with joy. It is equally the faith for the martyr and for the man of business, for the king and for the peasant. Each one of us has his own course. Let a man take Christ for his Master, and then, be his fortune what it may, if only he follow his Guide, he will have the satisfaction of feeling, at the end, that his life, though it were the humblest, had been like the apostle's, yea, like Christ's,—part of God's plan in the salvation of man. What inspiration better than this! What bitterness to feel at death that one has fought against wisdom in the vain effort to serve oneself! What peace to be able to feel that we have "finished the course!"

And now you will notice that in the remaining clause of this terse and eloquent passage, which fell from the apostle's lips under the evident strain of in-



tense emotion, he states in plain terms the original source of this satisfaction which in the previous clauses we have found him to express under such forcible figures. "I have fought the good fight," have thrown my energy on the side of Christ and righteousness. I have finished the course, have done my appointed task of mingled suffering and action. In fine, "I have kept the faith"—and, as we have seen, that good fight is the battle of faith; and the appointed course is the way of faith. It is evident that in this last clause we have the plain, straightforward statement of the source of the dying apostle's joy.

He had kept the faith. He speaks of it as a trust committed to his care. It had been given him by revelation from God, and to it he had devoted his whole life. He had kept it from the covert attacks of mistaken Christians and the open assaults of unbelief. He had kept it through those hours of spiritual darkness through which he, no less than others, had had to pass. He had kept it in Jerusalem before the mob howling for his denial of it; before philosophers who sneered at its absurdity; before Roman power, with its burning pitch, and bloody arena, and executioner's block.

Wonderfully varied had Paul's trials been. The prince of this world had used his shrewdest devices to filch his faith away. But the believer had kept his treasure, and now that the war and toil were over,

his faith stood by his side, like a protecting angel, pointing to the near reward.

It is certain that this is, in substance, the supreme duty for you and me. This phrase puts before us the principle by which alone our lives can be redeemed from eternal ruin. What you need, fellow-men, in your passage through this world, is to keep the faith. You have received it from God as truly as Paul did. You are heirs of nineteen Christian centuries—spiritual children of apostles, and prophets, and confessors—and there is no treasure which birth or work can give you equal to this Christian faith.

You will find this advice sorely needed. For the chief object of all evil is to take your faith away. I mean not merely that to this end are the arguments of professed infidelity directed. To this end are directed also the far subtler arguments of the practical world with which you must mingle. The pressure of constant work will tend to rob you of your faith, because it will suggest that what you gain comes only from your own skill and toil. The ways of the world, in its social relations, will too often suggest that it is folly to live for distant pleasures and rewards when tangible ones can be had immediately. Then, in the association of trial and sorrow, you will feel a giant's hand striving to wrest from you your faith in the goodness and being of God. You will find it the struggle of struggles to maintain your faith in God when His ways are strange;



## XVII

### GOD'S EDUCATION OF HIS CHILDREN

“As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and *there was* no strange god with him.”—DEUT. xxxii. 11, 12.

THAT God is in this world educating His children, is a truth that puts us in a position to understand much of His dealing with us that would otherwise be unaccountable. If He be thus doing, He must accommodate, for example, His disclosure of truth to our capacities: these must expand before more truth can be received. Slowly must the training proceed in order that our faculties may be strengthened, our sympathies quickened, our whole being lifted from step to step in the ascent toward complete knowledge.

This, you will see, throws light on the slowness with which revelation itself was given to the world, the time extending over a period of at least fifteen hundred years; on the peculiar manner in which it was interwoven with the history of national, and the progress of individual, life; on the gradual way in which the world, as a whole, is being led into the knowledge of divine truth. When we consider the vast numbers

of our race, and the intricacy of the process by which human souls must be trained, we must feel that the slow growth of man into the divine life is not so strange as at first might appear. And we shall perceive that this method is employed not because God does not know the end from the beginning; and not because He cannot, if He choose, work miracles of transformation; but because it is better for us that the course should be made by regular and gradual processes,—by methods adapted to us rather than to God.

This idea of patient training is expressed in our text with reference to God's treatment of Israel. The passage is part of the magnificent song which Moses addressed to the people before he left them, a song to which he was specially inspired, and in which he most poetically described their God and His dealing with them. Jehovah had found them lost and perishing; forgetful of their ancestral faith; polluted by pagan influences and by years of degrading bondage. Very patiently had He trained them; seeking to bring out their strength, but most compassionate of their weakness; instructing them in the way of salvation and forgiving their repeated transgressions; correcting their faults and developing their powers.

In this work Moses himself had shared, and he could speak of it feelingly. He had been the under-teacher, but he knew well that the truth taught was God's, not

his; the plan pursued, the patience shown, the wisdom manifested, the protection afforded, had all been the Lord's own doing. This he depicted under the figure of an eagle teaching her young to fly. Her object is to train their powers and, meanwhile, to protect them from peril.

As the picture of the text is a most striking and beautiful one, so the thought it contains, of the two-fold purpose of God in the education of His people, is a theme of universal application to all who by faith number themselves among His Israel. Let me present it to you in its application to ourselves. God is educating His people. If we rebel against Him, we are like truant children who will not go to school, and who must take the consequences of ignorance and self-will. If we submit, we shall find that, in this sense also, He is our Father. Observe that, according to the text, the double purpose in God's mind in relation to us is our development and our protection. Let us consider these in turn.

In the first place, then, God seeks by His treatment of us on earth to develop in us spiritual powers. I ought to guard this statement, indeed, by remarking that He does something more than simply develop. It is not true that mere education, even by a divine hand, will suffice to make any man what he ought to be. This is proved by the fact that the same course will benefit some and harm others. Nor is this dif-

ference a mere matter of nature. It is not true that some are born good and some bad; just as some are born bright and some dull. The Bible explicitly declares all to be born bad: and, therefore, before God can begin His education of the soul the germ of spiritual life must be implanted in it. You cannot train a dead vine, be the soil never so fertile and the sun never so constant. You cannot educate an imbecile. There must be life to be developed.

Hence in speaking of God's education, we can only refer to those in whom the spirit of faith has begun to dwell. To be sure, God may educate the race intellectually, but that does not secure the salvation of every member of the race. I would speak rather of His education of His people. They are believers. They have the Spirit. Only, their faith is perhaps as small as a grain of mustard-seed; their life is so weak and immature as to be like to the life of a weak plant rather than of a spiritual soul. It is, however, on this basis that God works, and the purpose of our text is to bring out His tender care in the development of the souls of His children. For to as many as receive Him, to them gives He power to become the sons of God, which are born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

With this proviso, notice the evidence which life affords of God's desire to develop our powers. It appears, first of all, in His recognition of our individual

freedom. We touch here upon a confessedly difficult subject; yet the general fact is certain and the bearing of it on our education is plain. We are conscious of being in some sense free. To be sure, we are also sensible that our freedom is limited. We cannot do all that we may choose. Our freedom is limited by our circumstances; which may as effectually confine us as a cage does a bird. It is limited by the rights and powers of others; by misfortune or by the habits of our own minds. Above all do we know that our freedom is limited by the moral law and by God Himself. But nevertheless we know that we are free. We are conscious of acting upon reasons; of being governed by intelligible motives. We select our aims and work toward them. We recognize certain principles and confess our allegiance to them. Or perhaps we rebel against them. We love, and hate, and think. So that while we are surrounded by forces mightier than we, while we are no doubt entirely dependent upon God at every moment and in every act for our very existence, still we are not mere pieces of machinery, but rational and self-acting spirits.


It matters not, I conceive, whether this freedom be all that we may suppose it to be or not. It matters not that we are often influenced by forces of whose action we know nothing; nor that, unknown to us, God Himself may be working in us and with us. Whatever may be back of our conscious life, in it we



are sensible of acting upon motives, and being governed by truth, and of growing in intelligence, and of making discoveries. This is part of man's personality; and therefore if he is to develop, it must be after the manner not of a machine, by having new parts added to it externally, but by the exercise of his powers, so that he grows from within outward, and transforms what he receives into part of his very being.

Therefore, mark how God presents to us the truth. No doubt, if He chose He might by His power make us become quickly what we ought to be; might take away all our love of sin; might at once create within us clean hearts; and might cause to dawn upon our minds at one vision the whole of truth. At least we may imagine such a proceeding, though probably you all feel that it would be so mechanical that it would not really develop us. It would be the making of a new race, not the uplifting of the old race. But whether supposable or not, this is certainly not the way in which God purifies and enlightens us. He uses truth. He treats us as intelligent persons to be persuaded and convinced. He has been at great pains to reveal to us Himself and His will; and that too, little by little, line upon line, and precept upon precept, that we may take it in.

He, therefore, presents to us Christ, and invites our faith: gives us evidence to weigh and an example to inspire. The Spirit uses the truth to



change our natures. No grown man can be converted except through the apprehension of the truth. You cannot change his life as you might change his coat, by some magical process, unintelligible to himself. The Spirit enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the Gospel. And so on through the Christian life. We are to know the truth that it may make us free. We are to strive to enlarge our knowledge of it; to apprehend its meaning and its proofs; to grow into it by its growing into us. This is the development, you see, of a spirit, not the growth of an animal or the erection of a building; and, therefore, God presents to you His truth, that by your personal apprehension of it, you—a free and thinking soul—may develop in the directions which the truth commands.

So, also, consider how God holds us accountable for our conduct. Accountability implies intelligence and freedom. It supposes that we are able to appreciate a difference between right and wrong, between truth and error. You would not reward or punish an inanimate object or a mere soulless animal. Yet man is to be rewarded or punished. Very clearly does the Bible reveal this. Christ is to pass judgment upon our lives. It will be a perfectly fair judgment. It will take into consideration our advantages and the amount of knowledge we have possessed. It will

make no mistakes. It will not give praise to actions which have proceeded from hypocritical motives, nor blame to errors which have been ignorantly committed. We must not imagine that a single inflexible standard will be made the measure by which all shall be gauged, or that the judgment of God is a procrustean bed into which all shall be fitted.

All these provisions for fair decision imply that God treats us as intelligent and moral beings, upon whom he throws responsibility, partly, at least, in order that we may be developed. We all know how earthly responsibilities develop men. They either develop or crush them. If a man prove equal to his position, he grows in power. The sense of its worth calls out his energies. The foresight of its consequences makes him rise to its requirements. The responsibilities of life—from which, perhaps, in our weaker moments, we would like to fly—are the means of our personal culture, without which we should ever remain like children in the nursery. So our responsibility to God is meant to bring us out. It is the recognition by Him of our spiritual natures, of our likeness to Himself; and we may most confidently affirm that nothing could take the place of responsibility in leading man into a really noble life.

Nor should I fail to point out in this connection the evident purpose of God's requiring of us all personal work of some kind in this world. The necessity of

work is absolute for man. No one is exempt, although the kind of work required differs greatly in different cases. This is a working world. The command to work was not given after, but before, the fall. In Eden itself our first parents were provided with employment. So in the kingdom of Christ, work is distributed to every servant. "To every man his work," said the Lord Himself. Under this we are to include our secular occupations. They are the posts assigned to us by Providence, and are quite as truly required of us as our more spiritual toil can be. Under this are to be included home duties likewise. Then to these are to be added spiritual work—work for Christ in our own souls and in the world. Viewed thus largely there is no exemption from the necessity of work. We must not separate the different kinds of work, as though God gave some and not others. They are all alike our work, the duties laid on us in our various relations. They are all, therefore, the means of training. And this is, perhaps, their chief object in God's sight.

Certainly God could carry on His own universe without our coöperation. He does not need laborers in His vineyard. He could put His own money to interest without entrusting it to the care of His servants. But then they would not be developed. For this, too, is the means of bringing out our powers. If you want to help a man, the best thing you can do for him

is to give him work. Merely to put money into his pocket is apt to do more harm than good, though it is far easier. But work will help him more. It will not merely support, but improve him. It will make a man of him: and, if he be worth aiding at all, he will be far more grateful for a situation than for a gratuity. Hence you see God's object. It matters little what the work be, so that we do it, and do it well. We become co-workers with him. The labor of life is not a curse but a blessing, if we engage in it with right aims. It is meant to mature us; to call out our faculties; to develop our patience and our endurance; and to test the spirit that is in us; and from a working life of some sort we should not desire to be relieved.

Finally, notice the light cast by this truth on the troubles and sufferings which God permits to befall us. That these are part of our training we are expressly taught. They are not sent in anger; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. Nor are they mere accidents of life, without purpose and uncontrolled; for though a man "fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand." We should not, indeed, belittle God's purposes by supposing that our individual benefit is the main object in all the trials of life. On the contrary, His purposes are vaster. He is dealing with many children at the same time, and one event will often have a score of

purposes. But neither should we go to the other extreme, and think that these trials have no individual worth and meaning for us. That they have is proved by what they may effect. For there is a strength won from suffering superior, oftentimes, to any other. Our falls and failures may make us wiser and stronger than ever success could have done. Our losses and bereavements may, by being humbly borne, produce a spiritual vigor, a spirituality of mind, which never would have bloomed under the constant sunshine of prosperity. Many a man has had reason to say, with David, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Thy word."

Purification by fire is oftentimes the only way of separating gold from dross. The strength which comes by resisting the temptation to rebel and complain; the faith which is exercised in darkness and grief; the love which gleams through tears, are developments of character the purest and best. Of these the Master sufferer is the great example. It is written of Him that though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered. He was perfected by suffering. Even He needed this education: not, indeed, for the purpose of purifying Him, for He was always pure, but for the purpose of enabling Him to perform the work of man's redemption. Thus even trial is part of our education. It, too, is due to God's recognition of our

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spiritual natures. It is the mark of our sonship, for by it God would fit us to share the life and glory of His greater Son.

Such, then, are some of the signs of God's desire to develop His children. There is not one of these facts of life under which we do not sometimes repine. We would even like to be relieved of our freedom, for we shrink from its tremendous responsibilities. We would like to be manufactured by magic into saints, without the peril and labor of learning the truth and following it. Fain would we escape work, and still more gladly would we fly from trouble. But think what these things mean. The eagle is teaching her young to fly. They must acquire the use of wings. They must be pushed out of the nest which overhangs the precipice that, perforce, they may exercise their powers. Otherwise they will never soar into the azure, nor fly with the boldness which belongs to them into the sun. So a father would teach his children to live. He wants to make men and women of them. He does not like to keep them forever in the nursery. He wants to see them taking their places in the world, exercising their faculties, becoming his own equals and friends. And thus our God would do.

If it were a mere matter of power, God could make a race of perfect souls at any time. But it is a matter of love also, of joy in the growing life of His children in their progress upward and toward Himself. Do

you say, you would rather be excused? You do not want to be educated? You have no desire to rise? You can escape it if you will; but if you do, you sink away from life, and happiness, and peace. It is part of your spiritual birthright to be trained: and though in hours of weakness we may shrink from the process, yet, surely, in a better moment we shall give thanks that the unseen Teacher has us in hand, and that, by His guidance, even we, weak and worthless as we may be, shall grow into the glorious life of the children of God.

And that we may not fear, I bid you note the other fact in God's education of His children, which I suggested, but which I can now only mention, without expanding it as I should like to do. I mean His work of protection. Quite beautifully does the figure of the eagle teaching her young to fly illustrate this. "As an eagle," said Moses, "stirreth up her nest"—there is the compulsion to flight, the necessity of development. And now follows the emblem of protection: "fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." Here we have a picture of the parent bird first forcing her young to fly; and then hovering about them lest they fall, spreading her strong, broad wings beneath them when they are weary: at once casting them on themselves and upholding them lest they perish.



You see how provision is made for our weakness. If life were but a stern education, it would be hard indeed. If God merely cast us forth to develop our faculties by struggle and toil, we should no doubt often go down into the dust. But in the exquisite figure of the text both sides of His care are equally presented. The father would have his son become a strong, well developed, well educated man; but he does not, therefore, send him out into the world, without sympathy or aid, to make his own way. He is ever ready to protect and help, as may be wise. Thus the highest result will be obtained, and God's children may know that, while He would develop them into a strong, mature, Godlike life, He is always by their side lest they fall.

For God is always with us. Unseen, He sees; unheard, He hears; unfelt, He upholds. The sense of this divine presence may of itself quicken our own powers. Even the one who has wandered farthest need not, like the prodigal, think of his father as away in a distant home. That was true only in the story. In fact the Father is always near. When we work, He works in us, and the heart of the believer may teem with new energy when mindful of the everlasting arms that are underneath and round about him at all times.

For God's presence means His watchfulness and sympathy. He is not present as an unconscious

force or as a careless observer. He is not present as nature is—who folds us in a cold embrace. He is not present as men are, to criticize as much as to help. He is present at every moment, and in every place, in all the fullness of His personal love. “I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me.” This effort to understand His truth, and to follow it, He does not fail to see, and to encourage. This brave acceptance of responsibility awakens at once His sympathy, and leads Him to instill into feeble hearts hearty strength. This obedient performance of duty, this meek acceptance of sorrow, are all observed by Him—and as our day is, so shall our strength be.

Yes, in this perilous affair of our spiritual growth—exposed as we are to enemies, unused as we are to such attempts, childish as our power and wisdom must appear—He is protecting that our education may proceed. If He compel us to meet temptation, He will not allow it to be greater than we can bear. If He force us out of our quiet retreats into the stern, hard, weary battle of life, He covers us with His shield, and puts vigor into our arms and a sword into our hands. If He send grievous sorrow, if He lead through fierce mental conflicts, if pain must be our lesson and the rod our instructor, nevertheless, His protection fails not. Ah! this is true education. It combines protection with development, and I take it that as the evident facts of

freedom, and responsibility, and work, and suffering prove that God would really develop our souls into perfect fellowship with Himself; so the experience of His people as plainly testifies that throughout the whole process, however long, He is their shield, their refuge, and their strength.

I pray you, therefore, to accept this great lesson of life. What is more common than for people to put themselves under the training of a master—be it in art, or science, or trade? Do we not need even more sorely a master in the art of living? Shall we not put ourselves with confidence into the hand of the divine Master, who knows all, and will lead us into the light? We must needs be docile. We must believe in His wisdom where we cannot understand. We must needs be ready to receive new light, and progress from stage to stage, from class to class. We must keep the eye single, the soul pure and true. We must follow our guide even when He leads us through dangerous passages—or, what is harder still—when in the dark we see Him not and only hear His voice.

But if our acceptance of Him has been sincere, we need not fear the issue. He will both protect and develop us, until at last we shall mount upon wings as eagles, shall enter on that perfect life for which all here has been a preparation, and shall do the works, and have the knowledge, and exercise the powers of the glorified sons of God.

## XVIII

### OUT OF THE DEPTHS

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord."—PSALM cxxx. 1.

WHAT is more instinctively condemned or felt to be more unworthy than a superficial life? It is a life which, as the word imports, is contented to float on the surface of things. A superficial examination of a subject is one which does not go to the foundations; which does not critically sift the matter in hand; which embraces in its survey merely the most obvious facts which none can fail to see. Such an examination is not worthy of the name. A superficial character is one that is governed by hasty judgments and regard for the nearest objects and most immediate interests; one that has not felt the force of permanent and radical principles, but is content to take its beliefs from hearsay and to regulate its conduct by impulse or unreasoning desire. And a superficial life is the outcome of such a character. It either cannot or will not face the real problems of existence. It does not realize the profound sea of mystery over which it gaily voyages, nor think of the illimitable heights that are above it. It lives, so to speak, from hand to mouth. It does not feel anything strongly. It is completely

absorbed in the moving panorama which passes before its eyes, and does not inquire concerning the hidden ropes and pulleys which make it move. The play and work of each day command its entire attention. Even sorrow does not profoundly agitate it. It lives its little span of life, in short, upon the surface of things; and, when its span is finished, it sinks into the depths which, while living, it never cared seriously to contemplate.

I say, we instinctively condemn such a life when it is plainly presented to us. Yet we must be aware that multitudes of men and women are living such lives. The ease with which many are satisfied with the most superficial idea of moral character is shocking. They take human applause for divine approval, and think that if they be, according to the world's standards, kind and friendly,—if they are guilty of no overt crimes,—they need strive for nothing more. The heedless diligence with which reasonable but unreasoning beings pursue the making of money as if it were the supreme end of existence, and the god on whose smile their happiness depends, must seem to the spirits that look down upon us as a boy's earnest sport seems to full-grown men. The recklessness with which many make life a play cannot but appall those who see the precipice on the edge of which the play goes on.

It is not strange that such people forget or deny God.

They do not feel the need of Him. Within their little circle He has no place, and the shallowest ideas of morals and religion prevail. Sometimes this is a willful choice of the temporal instead of the eternal. Sometimes it is due to mere feebleness of character, to inability to do more than float with the current. In spite of the centuries of religion, in spite of an uneasy consciousness of wrong, in spite of the repeated spectacle of death, in spite of the occasional glances which they cannot but give downward and upward, experience shows that it is only too possible for men and women to content themselves with living on the surface, and to refuse to grapple seriously with the hidden but ever present realities of man's existence.

It is in the light of this that I would read with you this verse of an ancient psalm. We have represented in it the exact opposite of a superficial life. We see a man who in some way had sunk below the surface, had seen and felt things which were not visible on top, had faced the profound facts which the superficial mind does not even perceive. There he had found God. There he had felt the need of God. There he had raised his prayer and had received an answer to it. "Out of the depths," he says, "have I cried unto Thee, O Lord." And from this deep experience he had emerged with a strength of faith and a sense of the moral realities of life which he had never had before. I would like to remind you of the depths

which we may and often must fathom, and the opportunities they afford for our laying hold upon Him who is the Light in our darkness and the Rock beneath the shifting waves of time.

It does not really require anything more than a simple effort of thought to enable us to sink below the surface and find ourselves in what may be truly called "the depths." A superficial life, if it thinks at all, knows itself to be superficial; for the simplest questions raised by the mind carry it into the realm of profound things. We have only to ask ourselves whence came we here, why are we here, whence came the world about us, why does it exist at all, in order to discover ourselves in the immediate presence of the very mystery of life, and oppressed by the necessity of going below the surface to find an explanation of it. These questions no man can help asking. They are not curious speculations. They are inevitably raised by the facts of daily experience. Only by shutting the mind's eye and deliberately remaining blind can we prevent their being forced upon us.

Thus it is a natural thing to ask whence we came. We cannot help assuming that everything in the world has had a cause. We can see the beginnings of most things, and we have never known anything to come into existence of itself. We cannot conceive, indeed, of such a thing. For ourselves, we know that we began to be; and, thus, the moment we begin

to think we find ourselves face to face with the necessity of accounting for the origin of the world and of ourselves as part of it. We are very sure, too, that the cause, whatever it is, must have been competent to produce the effect. We cannot suppose that a plant is produced by the soil out of which it grows; for the plant is a living thing, while the soil is not. So we cannot believe that the human mind has been produced by a chance collection of particles of matter; for the mind thinks, and matter does not think. Thus by a very few steps we go below the surface, and realize that we and the world must be the product of something or some person greater than we or it; that there must be some invisible Being back of the visible panorama; and that, in all probability, our relations to this Being, who must be the Cause of all, are far more important than are our relations to the visible people and things which we meet upon the surface.

Then, if we go a little farther down, and ask ourselves why we are, the mystery of life instantly grows even more profound. For man feels himself to be at once very little and very great. He is very little in comparison with the immense universe—a mere drop in the ocean of being—a mere atom in a measureless world of existence. He is physically very weak. His present life hangs upon a mere thread. He comes up like a flower and is cut down. In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening




it is cut down and withers. His life is as a vapor, which appears for a little while, and then vanishes away. Yet he is very great. He knows himself, which is more than even the mighty world about him does. He reasons. He can with his feeble hand chain the lightning and defy the storm. He can harness the forces of nature and drive them with his childish hands. He can rise to the idea of God; can know and love Him; and, despite his physical weakness, can be unconquerable in soul. As Pascal said, "He is a reed, the weakest thing in nature, but he is a reed that thinks." Although in one view he is utterly insignificant, in another view he is supremely great. When we look at these facts, the question, Why are we here? attains profound importance. A superficial answer is at once felt to be false. If at one moment we are inclined to say that it does not make much difference what we are or what we do; at another moment we feel that, with such power and capacities, we must be working out a sublime programme; must be only making preparation here for a higher condition; must be meant for some purpose commensurate with the dignity of the soul.

Thus, you see, it requires but the slightest effort of thought to lead us into the depths; to make a superficial life appear absurdly irrational; to make us realize that unless we seek to give some answer to these primary questions which are forced upon the

mind, we are guilty of deliberate recklessness. I do not know how often or how seriously these questions have come home to you. Possibly they may seem to you useless speculations, and you may have banished them by turning to what you call the practical duties of life. Possibly you may have taken shelter under the convenient plea that we cannot know anything about ulterior facts or immaterial causes; and may have for a while complacently dismissed the matter from your thought. But if so, you must, at least, confess that you are living on the surface, and that the fathomless depths are under you. Beyond doubt your carelessness or your agnosticism can last only for a time. Into the depths you must sink, if not now by thought, hereafter by death; and it surely is not becoming a rational being to refuse to face the questions which are thus forced upon his mind by the simplest action of his reason.

These inquiries are of almost oppressive magnitude. A man may dull his sense of them by absorption in work or pleasure, but I do not understand how anybody can fail to see that such dullness is the natural result of a mental anæsthetic. A man may find serious and real difficulties in the subject of religion; but I do not see how he can fail to find greater difficulties in any life which does not seriously attack these fundamental questions. It also seems certain that in these depths of mystery, into which the simplest thought




takes us, the most reasonable thing is to call upon God. Does not He present that solution of the mystery of human life which, taking it all in all, is the most satisfactory to the mind itself? The agnostic says there is no solution possible, and he says this because not everything is clear and plain : somewhat as a child who, because he cannot get all he wants, says he will take nothing. The materialist says all is the blind result of physical force acting mechanically ; and hence he must conclude that the seeming greatness of man is a delusion, and that as he came by chance into existence, he will vanish after a while into dust. But does not this answer raise more difficulties than ever, and make larger demands on our credulity than ever religion did? We have about as much reason to think that life and mind came out of matter as we have to suppose that two and two ever made five.

On the other hand, the belief in God provides at least a rational, thinkable explanation. It provides a cause adequate to produce the effects with which we are concerned. It supplies an origin for the mind of man, which accounts for his powers and gives hopes to his heart ; explaining both his littleness and his greatness. I do not say that faith in God explains everything to us. But is it not, to say the least, the most probable explanation? Does it not throw more light on life than any other theory? It is most reasonable out of these depths to call upon him—nothing else

can satisfy. Nothing else can help us. The superficial life which forgets God seems utterly false and futile when a man begins to think about life. For when the real, underlying problems are felt, the supreme necessity for Him is felt; and in some way nearly every man calls upon Him.

But for one man who sounds the depths of life by an effort of thought, a dozen sound them through the experience of sorrow and disappointment. Jesus said: "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted." Whatever else the words may mean, they imply at least that there is more blessedness in being comforted than in not mourning at all. Yet, certainly, He did not regard sorrow and trouble as good in themselves. He came to relieve and end them. He came to bring peace and rest to earth. Nevertheless, He knew that, as men are, the deepest lessons of life will not be learned except through a more or less bitter experience, and that the sweetest joys and the highest truths will come to humanity only through the sad instructress, sorrow.

We know only too well that a happy, prosperous, successful life is apt to become superficial. Let there be no disappointments to speak of; let there be for many years no great bereavement; let there be no hard struggle for bread or for pleasure; and man is apt to miss entirely the chief ends of life's discipline. His course will "run glit-




tering like a brook in the open sunshine,"—bright, but shallow; pretty, but not deep. He is likely to have but little sympathy; for we must know somewhat of the ills of life in order to help others through them. He is likely even to become hard in his judgments, skeptical in his opinions. Men talk of gratitude for blessings as a stimulus to faith, but it may be doubted whether trials and crosses do not furnish a greater stimulus. The happy life is apt to be a careless one. Supplies that come easily awaken no great sense of gratitude. Were we to imagine all the sorrows banished from man's experience, all trials prevented, all disappointments forestalled, and man left at the same time in the same moral condition in which he now is, we should see a world forgetful of spiritual things, heedless of divine realities and moral responsibilities; a world of singing birds and gorgeous butterflies, but not a world of either great thought or lofty aspiration.

Freedom from sorrow is promised us in heaven only on the assumption that there we shall be holy enough not to need it. Tears shall there be wiped from all faces because the moral necessity for tears shall have been overcome. Happiness in external things shall be attained because the internal conditions of it have been first possessed. But as man now is, it does not take much observation to see that entire freedom from trouble would tend only to make him

satisfied with the superficial life of a well-fed body and a cultivated mind.

So Providence does not permit us to live such lives. Again and again are we compelled to go down into the depths. The crust breaks. The pleasant, easy life is rudely interrupted, and man sinks, burdened by a weight of woe, into the abyss below him. Then his views of life change. In the bitterness of disappointment over the failure of his dearest hopes he feels the vanity of the common pursuits which the world is so earnestly following. He understands, if ever, that the real end of life cannot consist in the enjoyment of earthly gains; he realizes that if satisfaction is ever to be found, it must spring from causes lying deeper far than the relationships which this world provides. Keen sorrow enters his home, and under the blight of loss his heart seems to be swallowed up by grief. He wonders why tender affection should be created to be thus rudely broken; why he should be made the apparent sport of misfortune and calamity. These are depths which all have to fathom. The experience comes in different forms, but it comes to all. Oh, the depths of pain and anguish over which in prosperous days we glide! Oh, the terrible convulsions of grief, of which we are capable, into which we may be plunged; the deep, dark passages of life which make a mockery of the work and play which proceed on the upper surface!



Blessed, indeed, is he who can wrest from these grievous hours a divine lesson, so finding in them a balm as well as a calamity, and good even amid the evil.

This, at least, is clear—that in the depths of sorrow men always feel the need of God, even if they do not love Him or submit to Him. Sorrow, of course, affects men differently, just as the same warm sunlight falling on a plant with little root will wither it, but falling on another plant, whose roots run deeply into the rich soil beneath it, will cause it to flourish and be beautiful with bloom. So some men are crushed and hardened by their troubles; others are sanctified and blessed, according as the life is or is not strong with faith and the desire for spiritual attainment. But this is true of all—whatever the effects may be—that in the depth of the dark, gloomy passages of life all feel the need of God. The rebellious sufferer cries out for God to set things right. The patient sufferer no less feels his need of help, and looks for it to come. But all feel the same need. The impotence of man is now manifest. The dependence of the human spirit on something greater than itself or than the world is plain. The vanity of the superficial life, with its lying promises, its fading beauty, its broken pledges, its mockery of strength, appears as a thin, unsubstantial fact. The need of God becomes imperative.

See now what human life is, how utterly lost and

undone if there be no mighty Helper, no loving Father, no pitying Christ. Down in the depths the suffering soul instinctively reaches out its hands, even though manacled by doubt—instinctively raises its voice, even though bitter with rebellion—for God, for nothing less than God, for God as the only One sufficient for the awful needs of the lonely, failing heart. Such depths are places of revelation. They show what even the common superficial life needs, though it may not be aware of it. They bid us know our real Helper, that when we rise again to the common level we may not forget the supreme lesson taught us by this glimpse, through tears, into the tremendous realities of life. Woe to that man who in prosperous times forgets the lesson. If out of the depths you have called upon God, then remember Him and honor Him when on the mountain top and in the clear sunshine. You need Him then just as much. Your sorrow was but the means of showing you what common life should always bear in mind, for He who appears as man's only refuge and strength in times of trouble is not less his lawful Lord, his profoundest need, at every moment and in every circumstance of life.

While thought and sorrow thus let men down into the depths of life, and show them their need of God, yet neither of these appears to explain the particular experience of the Psalmist when he cried, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord." That which

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had broken through the crust of a superficial life in his case was conviction of sin. This is plain from the following language of the Psalmist; for he adds, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." His conscience had been awakened. He had realized the enormity of sin. His accuser had stood before him, charging him with faults enough to condemn him forever. He had seen that he was full of sin, burdened with guilt, in imminent danger of punishment. He sank into the depths, overwhelmed by fear, beholding the justice of God and His power to inflict penalty, swallowed up in despair and the consciousness of guilt. Now the pleasant life of the every day world seemed a mockery indeed. It appeared to be the laughter of a criminal awaiting execution, the blind and foolish play of men hastening to death, the impious sport carried on under the shadow of the overhanging sword. The soul had awakened to a sense of what sin is—of what it means to the sinner and to God—and in the depth of this conviction it cried for the One who alone can forgive and save.

This shows us a depth over which the superficial life is always passing—which it often will not believe in—but which when entered discloses more vividly the moral reality of things than even thought or sorrow does. How insensible men are to the real

significance of sin! They admit that there is sin in the world, for they cannot shut their eyes to the fact. They admit that they are faulty; for their failure to fulfil all their human duty is so patent that the most delusive theories and the most pleasant dreams cannot altogether deceive them. But the superficial life does not see the significance of sin. It treats sin as a venial fault—some defect of blood or some disease—which has even an attractive as well as a disagreeable side. For the most part it quite condones it. It does not allow it to cause discomfort. It does not allow sin to lessen its enjoyment of nature, its delight in society, its material pleasures, its pursuit of ambitious schemes. So the shallow world hastens on in its selfish career, quite unmindful of what the occasional stings of conscience mean, what its uneasy dread of death forebodes.

But let the crust break, let the conscience awaken, let the living soul, laden with its guilt, go down into the depths of an aroused moral conviction. What then does it behold? It sees itself under sentence by the Almighty! Sin is transgression of His law. It is hideous in itself and hateful in His sight. It now is seen to have infected the whole life; to have shut God out of our thought, to have alienated us from our true Master, exiled us from our true home. It is seen to contain in itself the power of endless death, to be a relentless tyrant inflicting the penalty of eternal justice on the sinner, to be leading

its victims to the woes and the misery of hell itself. What an awakening! What a spectacle! Yet it is most real. It is a revelation of truth. It shows in truest form the moral reality of things, and when a man finds himself in the power of sin, knows that it has seized and bewitched him, and beholds what God must think of his condition, and how, of necessity, He must condemn him, he has sounded the depths indeed.

Then must he call upon God alone. Then he sees that no one can save him but God. He feels as never before his need of salvation. He asks only for forgiveness. His sins roll over his memory like great ocean billows. Every evil deed points its finger of condemnation at him. Whither shall he flee but to God himself? Blessed it is to hear in the depths of an awakened conscience the voice of one who speaks to men in such a state with the authority of God, and says, "There is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared." Ay, there is forgiveness! It was these sins for which God's Son offered sacrifice at Calvary. It was these accusing voices which He proposed to hush when the Redeemer cried, "Father forgive them." The love of God gleams out in Jesus Christ like the sun through the darkness, reaching down even to the depths in which conviction plunges a man; and whispers in his ear, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." Out of



such an experience a man learns what God and Christ are with a distinctness which no other instruction can possibly impart.

I ask you if you have sounded the depths of life in any of these ways? Much of our lives must be passed upon the surface, but I adjure you not to forget the depths below and their revelations. Do not be deceived by the temporal and the visible. In your hearts you know that need of God which is disclosed by the profound moments of thought and sorrow; and conscience discovers the reality—that by which you must live—that which you will have to face. Be guided then by these discoveries. If in the depths you have cried unto the Lord, then in every day life make Him your God, your Master, your Saviour. I plead for this, knowing that however for a while the deceiving superficial life may continue, in the end you must deal with the unseen realities. I plead for a real faith, for true contrition and confession, for self dedication unto God. Will you not heed the pleading, that when you sink into the depths you may find God merciful, forgiving, faithful, and true, waiting to sustain, to receive, to save you? He is your need, your supreme need. I beseech you, in Christ's name, be ye reconciled to Him.



## XIX

### MANY MANSIONS

“In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”—JOHN xiv. 2.

THE disciples of Jesus were utterly dazed by the thought of His departure from them; or, if they had not yet realized that He was really going away, He knew that they would be dazed when the event took place. Separation from the Master seemed to them the destruction of all that had made life worth living. It left them exposed to the hatred of the world, without the protection which Christ's power and personal presence had always afforded. It left them to do a work which even He, in their view, had not yet succeeded in doing. It left them bewildered by the apparent triumph of His enemies. It left them lonely for the want of His dear companionship; helpless for the want of His never-failing power; ignorant, fearful, and doubting. So long as they knew Him to be with them, they could safely and confidently go forward; but, separated from Him, they were likely to be lost in a maze of doubt and fear. They could at least appreciate the truth of what He said, “Apart from Me ye can do nothing.” We cannot better grasp the won-

derful superiority of Jesus to His age and His fellow-men than by considering the fact that even those who were nearest to Him, and whom He had taught the longest, felt themselves helpless when He left them.

These words which Jesus spoke to comfort and encourage His disciples have become of supreme worth and joy to all believers ever since. For we all have to face substantially the same crisis in which the first disciples found themselves. Humanity is dazed and bewildered by the universal fact of death, whether we think of it as threatening ourselves or those we love. Men start on grand careers only to find them leading to the inevitable prison-house. Men enter upon sweet and ennobling relationships only to find them rudely dissolved by the inexorable hand. The best plans are thwarted by it; the noblest lives are overcome by it; the most useful servants of God and humanity are remorselessly and often, to our mind, inopportunately cut down. Hence these disciples of Jesus, cowering under the shadow of the coming tragedy, were types of all mankind, and the words of Christ to them are of equal value to us. He alone saw beyond the shadow. He alone knew both worlds,—the one beyond the veil and this. At no time did He speak with more imperial dignity,—more obviously with the knowledge of divinity itself,—than when He forgot His own impending sorrow in commiseration of theirs, and told them what, from His loftier position,

He could see. As one standing on a mountain summit may describe to the inhabitants of the valley below the glorious landscape which he beholds, and in the wealth and beauty of which both are to share, so did Jesus speak to us these memorable words of comfort and cheer.


Let me examine with you, then, these words of Christ simply with the purpose of setting forth as much as possible of what they contain.

In my Father's house, He said, are many mansions, or places of abode. He had just said: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me"; and then He added this in order, it would seem, to give His disciples a definite and tangible object on which to fix their hope, without which faith could not exist at all. It appears to me, however, that these words have been often misunderstood. Evidently, the emphatic word in the sentence is "many." But if so, and if, as on the common view, the Father's house be understood to refer to heaven alone, it is difficult to see the appropriateness of the words to the disciples' needs. The fact that in heaven there are many places of abode, many homes for many people, many grades of glory for many kinds of saints, is doubtless true. But how this could comfort the disciples in view of Christ's departure does not so easily appear. What would comfort them would be the clear revelation of the other world itself



and of Christ's continued relationship to them, though gone into that other world; and this we may judge, from all the connected verses, was the truth which He sought to impress upon their minds.

It would seem, therefore, that by His Father's house Jesus did not mean merely the future abode of the blest. Give the phrase a larger meaning, and the force of His comfort will be more plain. He had called the temple, you remember, His Father's house, saying to the tradesmen whom He drove from its sacred precincts, "Make not My Father's house a house of merchandise." What more natural, then, than for Him to regard the whole universe itself, of which, in one sense, the temple was a type, as His Father's house? Such, in fact, it is. God no more dwells merely in the heaven of heavens than in temples made by hands. The whole universe is filled with His presence, and has been created by Him to be the place where His children shall dwell in companionship with Himself. Jesus, though despised and rejected of men, was at home in the world with God. Did He not evince the greatest familiarity with nature, gathering from her processes His illustrations of divine things? He had no quarrel with nature or with matter. He had a quarrel only with sin. The universe was still His Father's house. He implied as much when He told the Samaritan woman that no place was more sacred than another, but that in all alike the true worshiper




would be accepted. Hence, in His intercourse with His disciples, He had brought heaven down to earth, and they had found in their relationship with Him that which made life seem worthy of everlasting continuance.

Thus I understand that the Lord meant by His "Father's house" the whole vast universe; and if so, the point of His comfort to the disciples becomes clear. "In my Father's house, He said, are *many* mansions." Do not suppose that this world is all, or that beyond the veil, even the blessedness and joy of this world will not be surpassed. You have found a home here. You have found God here. You have here learned that it is possible to dwell with God. But this is only one mansion and there are many more. You have entered only the first. There are myriads that you have not seen. Do not, therefore, tremble if I leave you. This world is not the whole of the stage on which redemption is to be wrought out. Do not think that death is dissolution to the soul, or that its personal and spiritual relationship to God will be affected by death. If such had been the case I would certainly have told you, and my course of instruction would have been very different. This world is but one place of abode with God. There are innumerable more, and only with these in thought can you realize the worth and promise of a Christian life.

No doubt the false astronomy of that day made it

somewhat more difficult for the disciples than for us to grasp the scope of the Saviour's words. At any rate, with our clearer knowledge of the physical universe fresh force is given to His language. We know that ours is but one of countless worlds, that the Father's house contains mansions upon mansions, in tiers innumerable: and with every increase of power in the lenses of our telescopes, the bounds of God's great temple have been placed further off. It is quite possible too that even within the space occupied by the visible universe another exists, and that the veil of gross matter hides from our knowledge a world into which only the released spirit finds admission. We are in a universe of mystery, into which both faith and science peer with equal right and with equal profit, and while neither faith nor science can claim to know more than "but in part," both testify, in confirmation of Christ's words, that our present abiding place is but the vestibule of a world the vastness and the possibilities of which are beyond our power to imagine.

Thus He who had come down from heaven and had brought heaven with Him to the earth; He who remembered the glory which He had had with the Father before the world was; He who had manifested God's glory on earth to the men who had been given Him out of the world,—pointed His disciples to the vast universe of being which they could not see, but which He could see, and bade them believe that the




happy life which they had begun with Him on earth would reach beyond death and separation, and find its increasing fruition in other realms, which will be but other apartments in our heavenly Father's house.

I beg you to notice, before we pass on, what direction these words of Christ give to our thoughts of both life and death. On the one hand, He did not undervalue the life in this world. Men who think much of the future are apt to undervalue the present. Some fancy that the present is wholly evil and that no enjoyment is to be properly found here. But Christ did not so think or teach. He assured us that this world is one of the mansions in our Father's house, and that it is possible to enjoy here true pleasure and real divine companionship. A little later He said: "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." So He said, "Abide in me, and I in you." Thus earth may be a mansion of God if we abide with Him and He with us. It is what we make it. To the prodigal it is a far country, because his heart is far from God. To the Christian it is part of the Father's house, because he dwells with God. In a supreme sense did Jesus abide with God, and, therefore, in spite of all that He suffered, He could still call it His Father's house. Thus by faith we may enter heaven even here, and in our fellowship with God enjoy the thought that we are part of

His household, have a right to His provisions, and are secure in His dwelling. It will make life happier and more peaceful, it will give to the world a holier beauty, if we live in it as in our Father's house.


Then, on the other hand, mark how Jesus thought of death and the hereafter. He carried over into the hidden world the natural instincts which have been here sanctified in Christian life. Men thought of it then, as often they do now, as cheerless and phantom-like. He thought of it as not losing one jot of the sweetness and joy of the present, but divested of every trace of present sorrow and pain. It is still our Father's house. There, too, are places of abode for us. It will be as truly home as any place we have ever known. It will realize all that we now hope for. In it will culminate the best part of life, while there will be no drawbacks. Death is but the passage from the lower to the higher mansion. By it we lose nothing and gain much. It makes no rupture in the life of the soul. The believer is still in his Father's house, only taken to another apartment. All that is now good will be made better; and all that is now evil will be removed, as through the heavy curtains which divide this abode from those beyond it, the disciple of Jesus goes. Not as pointing us from what is bad to what is good; but as pointing us from what is good to what is better, from partial knowledge and incipient holiness and the beginning of peace to com-



pleteness of life and to fullness of blessing, did Jesus stand on the verge of His own departure and bid us have no fear, but rather have hope and eager confidence. "In my Father's house are many mansions." So far from this life exhausting good, it is but the commencement and the foretaste of greater good to come.

Having thus assured His disciples of the existence of a better home above, the Saviour added, "I go to prepare a place for you," and in these words the comfort which His previous words had suggested is more expressly given. Let us see if we can grasp the full purport of the declaration.

It assured the disciples, for one thing, that their departing Lord would not forget them. On the contrary, they would be as much in His thoughts as they had been during the three years of His earthly companionship with them. There would be no severance of those precious relations of love and protection which they had learned to value so highly. He would be still the same, and the friendship of the past would be continued in the invisible realm beyond. How often to stricken hearts has this thought brought comfort! It is not possible that the human soul should blot out the past, or that memory should cease to act even amid the transcendent glories of the skies. We may be sure that love will not be vanquished by death; that it will only be purified, and will harmonize more perfectly with the divine will. We may be sure



that saints in glory are waiting with eager hope for the coming of their friends. Christ is so waiting; and in His heavenly mansion His love is as tender, His interest is as keen, His sympathy is as quick, as His disciples found it to be on earth. He is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and forever."

But His language not only assured the disciples of His continued interest in them, but, going further, assured them that His chief object in the other world would be to work for them. Here His words soar quite beyond anything that we can apply to ordinary friends. They remind us of the constant activity of Christ in behalf of His Church. Do not imagine that His work was finished at Calvary, and that He has since been merely waiting to enjoy the future triumph. Only the sacrifice was there finished. When He ascended it was to enter on a far more extended work in behalf of His people. His earthly ministry was merely the time in which He began to do and to teach. Now He is, as Paul says, "Head over all things to the Church." He is ruling and defending us, restraining and conquering both His and our enemies.

You remember how He is pictured in the Apocalypse, seated on a white horse, with many crowns upon His head, a two-edged sword issuing from His mouth, going forth conquering and to conquer. This is a symbolical picture of one phase of His activity. He has

not left us to work out our salvation alone. On the contrary, it is because He is working for us that we succeed at all. A parent's toil supplies the wants and provides for the education of his child, though the little one is often quite unconscious of the fact, and is busy with the performance of its daily tasks. So Christ's activity, though by us unfelt, is the guarantee of our life and progress. "Because I live, ye shall live also." When He left His Church, it was only that in another sphere He might enable the Church to reach her glorious destiny.


Still more specifically, His words indicated not only His continued interest in and work for His disciples, but the particular object of His work. "I go," He said, "to prepare a place for you." It is to the object thus specified that our attention should be directed. Our Lord, you remember, had been speaking of places of abode. He had described the universe as the Father's house. He had declared that there are many mansions, literally many places of abode, of which this world is but one. Now He was going to prepare a place for them. All these phrases indicate that the home of the blessed is to be a material locality. Christ did not go to prepare a state for us or a mode of being. That is prepared in us, not for us. We cannot explain away His phraseology.

Nor should we desire to do so. We need a place to live in, if life is to be worth anything. You know



how much our happiness and our mental growth in this world depend on our surroundings. When our religion and our circumstances are in conflict, this may indeed be a means of discipline; but this painful experience can never be regarded as meant to continue always. On the other hand, however, God has always provided a place for the development of human character. He prepared this earth to be our first abode, the place of our probation. Then He selected portions of the earth to be the places in which the life of humanity should unfold itself under His guidance. Eden for Adam, Canaan for Abraham and Israel. We need not have the least doubt, therefore, that the same rule will hold good after death. The outward and the inward are to correspond, and if in this life the soul is being prepared for its future home, a future home is as really always being prepared for the soul.

Furthermore, Christ's language would seem to imply that until He left the world the home of the saints had not been prepared. Did it ever occur to you that the place whither the souls of Christ's people now depart could not have existed, at least in its present form, until after His ascension? If you ask, Where then did the saints of old time go,—Abraham, Moses, and the prophets,—we reply that no doubt they went to a happy and holy place; but that there must have been a great and glad change for them when Jesus



returned from His work of sacrifice, Victor and King. For only then did He make the home of glory ready as now it is. The Kingdom had indeed been prepared from the foundation of the world; but the place had not. Not that He created a new world. He prepared the place, He made it ready. In fact, I suppose, He then only began to make it ready, and that it is still being gloriously prepared. We rightly sing, "He is fitting up my mansion." The work of preparation continues as the generations come and go, and will be finished only when the work of man's salvation shall have been brought to its conclusion at the end of the world.

How, then, are we to understand this work of preparation which Christ is carrying on for His people in the place above? To what did He refer when He used this language to those wondering disciples?

For one thing, He went to prepare a place for us by going and dwelling there Himself. Jesus Christ is somewhere in the body; and wherever He is, that is the place whither His people are to go, that is the home of the redeemed. Simply by dwelling there Himself has He done most to prepare it for us. When God said, "Let there be light," the work of the preparation of earth for man's abode was, to be sure, begun; but when He set the sun in the heavens a higher stage of preparation began; the sun is the great vitalizer of the world, and of itself has made life here possible. So when Christ ascended to the skies, His presence

prepared a place for us. Near Him naught but beauty and holiness can be; and if the physical sun has made the beauty and fruitfulness of this fair world, what must be the glory of that place where there is no need of the sun to shine in it, for the glory of God doth lighten it and the Lamb is the light thereof! You have known houses, perhaps, that have been homes because of the presence in them of one beautiful, lovely character which has shed a moral beauty and attractiveness over the entire place,—its glory in life, its brightest memory in death. Similarly it is from Christ that the influence goes out which prepares a place for us.

Then, further, He went to prepare a place for us by going there as our representative. He is the Captain of our salvation, the first-fruits of them that slept. He went as our victorious Redeemer, our accepted Sacrifice, our crowned King. We should have no right to stand in the presence of the Almighty if Christ were not there as our Head. He prepares room for us among the angels, room near the throne of God. What are we,—sinful and frail,—that we should expect to take our places among the unfallen hosts? We should not dare to hope for it if we did not know that by His presented sacrifice and by His glorious victory He has prepared a place for us.

Still further, we may no doubt properly suppose that He went to prepare a place which shall be

adapted in the highest degree to our needs. Of course, we do not know in what that adaptation shall consist. We do not often know beforehand what circumstances, even in this world, will be best adapted to us. We have to trust God to lead us to the places which are best for us; and, wherever He puts us, there we must do the work demanded, believing that the place is best. So we cannot say beforehand what the character of the place shall be where the perfect life of the future is to be passed. Yet we are sure that it will be adapted to our needs. God has adapted this world so wondrously to us that we cannot doubt that the future will be adjusted also. It will be a place of work, and at the same time of rest. It will be a place of growth, and at the same time of moral perfection. It will be a place of social relationships, and yet also of the highest individuality. So we might speculate. But speculation is useless. It is enough to know that a place shall be prepared for us, and, therefore, perfectly adjusted to every need.

Finally, I feel confident that, as already intimated, we may extend the reach of these words on unto the end of the present dispensation, and include in them all that Christ is doing as King of the universe, as Heir of the future, to subdue all things unto Himself and so unto His people. There are clear intimations in Scripture of physical changes by which nature herself will be tuned into sympathy with the song of

the glorified, and made to quiver, as she does not now, with the harmonies of redemption. We read: "The whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." We read: "We, according to His promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." We read: "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We are distinctly told that the dead are to be raised again and clothed with celestial bodies. Christ, therefore, is bringing about a changed universe, even as He is securing a changed race; and at the end it will appear that if we are prepared for a new world we shall find a new world prepared for us. Ah, what a sweep and what a sweetness there was in this assurance which He gave His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you!" We may take the words to ourselves. They were not meant for apostles alone, but for all disciples; and while we gaze, dimly and tearfully, into the shadow of the grave, how welcome the strong accents of the great Sufferer: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

So now, dear friends, let these words of Christ dwell richly in your hearts, comforting and inspiring you. Look beyond the narrow horizon of this world and believe that all the vast domain is still your Father's house, and that the soul that is reconciled to God cannot lose its way, can never perish, will always have its home. Believe in God, believe in Jesus Christ, and by your faith look death and separation in the face. It is but transition to another mansion in the same Father's house. You will find it so. Others have found it so. Christ declared it was so. Let us journey on, doing with our might what we find to do, thanking God for the beauty of this world, and for the salvation which He has sent us. Let us make that salvation ours,—and whenever our dear ones are called away, and, above all, when we ourselves receive the final call, let us think of these words of the Master, and be comforted and be strong. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? . . . Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”



## XX

### THE JUDGMENT

“And the heavens shall declare His righteousness: for God is judge Himself.”—PSALM l. 6.

THE conviction that we are to be judged for the lives we spend on earth is so deeply impressed upon the human mind that it can hardly be a delusion. It is found, under various forms, in all religions. Now it is conceived as a formal sentence pronounced from a divine tribunal; now, as the result of laws which, by a natural process, distribute after death reward or punishment. But no religion is without the idea; and, indeed, we can hardly conceive of a religion,—if it be more than the feeblest sentiment,—existing without teaching that human lives are to be fairly and exactly judged.

Probably this conviction is to be attributed to a variety of causes. It springs partly from the sense of responsibility which lies as a primary truth in the conscience of man. It springs partly also from the difference felt to exist between right and wrong; which, likewise, the human conscience proclaims, and which implies that a good life deserves reward, while a bad life deserves punishment. Another cause of this



belief may be found in the observation that in this world justice is not perfectly meted out, so that the awards which conscience asserts ought to be given would not be given unless a further judgment follow after death. There is also the feeling that if there be a God, He must be a Governor of the world. He would otherwise scarcely fulfil His name or office. He would be an idea without life if He did not now watch, and hereafter judge, the lives of His creatures. To this may be added the fact that even on earth there is an evident tendency of virtue to bless and of vice to curse; and while, on the one hand, the imperfect operation of this tendency calls for an adjustment of men's deserts after death, so, on the other, the tendency itself is an earnest and a prediction of such an adjustment to come.

By the union of these instincts and observations and evident facts, the conviction of a judgment to come has fastened itself immovably in the human mind. Only a skepticism which would destroy all religion can set at naught so universal a belief; and even those men who hold as little as possible of religion, and who entirely reject a revelation, seldom venture formally to deny a future judgment.


This belief, moreover, is as exalting and inspiring as it is solemnizing. Instead of nature being like a hard, thick wall in which we are enclosed, it is made to appear like a globe of transparent glass through which

the infinite Father looks in upon our lives. Instead of supposing that among the multitude of beings in which we occupy so small a place we shall be unobserved, we are assured that not one of us escapes the divine notice. This gives dignity to life.

“A crowd of witnesses around  
Hold us in full survey.”

Above all, the sleepless eye of the great God beholds us. Life is no obscure, worthless thing. It is being observed, estimated, and judged, and at the end its worth will be declared. While such a truth may fill us with shame in our hours of sin and weakness, it is no less the ally and support of all the nobler efforts that we make.

Then the Bible confirms this belief in a divine judgment, and clarifies our conception of it. To it God is an ever-present reality. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him; and there is not a word on our lips but He knows it altogether. He, therefore, is “the Judge of all the earth.” In the Old Testament we read of many historical judgments which in this world He has pronounced against nations and individuals; and in the New Testament we are told of the period when these shall culminate in a general judgment of all flesh. Men shall give account to Him for the deeds done in the body. Their lives shall be estimated according to the light they have



had. Each man shall give account of himself to God, and the result shall be to exhibit, in the sight of all the universe, the righteousness, and wisdom, and goodness,—in short, the glory,—of the Lord.

This is the idea conveyed by the opening verses of the Psalm from which the text is taken. They magnificently describe the coming of God to judgment, and the solemnity of the scene is reflected in the majesty of the verse. "The mighty God . . . hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof." So the Psalm opens. He is the Lord worshiped by the Church, for it is out of Zion that God has shined. He is coming to utter His decisions. The fire of judgment plays about His throne. He will summon heaven and earth to hear. He will vindicate the faith of those who have believed His word. He will fulfil His covenant with them. He will reprove and condemn the rebellious and "the heavens shall declare His righteousness," the universe shall approve His decisions, for "God is judge Himself." No other, and none less, shall pass the sentence. It is His prerogative,—as He alone has the ability,—to judge the earth. The infinite Being who called the world into existence, and who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being and perfections, He shall estimate the worth, and assign the awards, to every human life.

We have here, then, presented the character of God

as certifying to the rightfulness and the righteousness of the judgment to be passed on our lives. And I would remark, at the outset, that since "God is judge Himself," such judgment is a rightful thing. It ought to be. God has a right to judge us. Did another assume to do so, we might reasonably protest. But God is judge Himself, and before His tribunal we are bound to bow.

It is not hard, indeed, to imagine men protesting against the whole situation. By what right are we to be thus interrogated? We repel the assumption which other men sometimes make of a right to judge our private affairs; and if we do not injure our fellows, and do not violate public law, why should our thoughts and feelings, our private use of our own possessions, be investigated? The question is not an altogether unreasonable one. These are, indeed, like the poor foolish words of a school-boy who rebels against the authority which he cannot escape. When in sober moments men reflect upon the greatness of God, their wish for independence of Him seems vain indeed. Yet, if God merely overcame us by His superior power, we might protest though we were forced to yield. The question is one of right, not of power. By what right shall we be made to stand before His bar? We are told that our own consciences will themselves approve His judgment, and yet men sometimes persuade themselves that conscience says

they ought to be independent. How, then, may God demand that all the dead,—small and great, learned and ignorant, Christian and pagan, man and child, of all ages and climes,—shall give account of themselves to Him? By what right will He demand this of you and me?

We reply, that He has the right to judge, simply because He is our Creator. Men often talk as if they had made themselves and were the authors of their own lives. One would think, from their protests against God's government, that they had come under it by a sort of "social compact;" as if they were independent beings who had generously consented to be subject to the divine authority. God seems to be to them little more than an elected monarch, and they would limit His rights and prerogatives until He had left no more authority than an English sovereign. But what are the facts? It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves. He is the absolute and free Creator of the world and all that is therein. But for His will we would not have been at all. He called nature into being; He made and gave us our minds. As truly as the potter makes the earthen jar, has God made us. Yea, He has made not only the form, but the material itself. We need not discuss the method of creation. We may admit all you choose of second causes and slow developments. Still, the power before and behind all is God's will. He created

matter; He created mind; and over the evolution of matter, and over the development of mind, He has presided. He was under no compulsion to create, though, doubtless, He found pleasure in so doing. He is, in the most absolute sense, the author of all beings. Creatorship, and especially such an absolute creatorship as this, carries with it ownership,—the Creator's right of property in the creature of His hand.

You can partially illustrate this by the similar right of property as it exists among men. A man may, in a limited sense, make his own fortune, and when made, it is his. He can use it as he sees fit. He can hoard, or he can waste. Or, to take an illustration more in point, a man may make, in a certain sense, a business for himself. By his industry, by his ability, he may build it up. It is his, and he is the absolute director of its affairs. Has he not then the right to examine and inquire into the work done by his employees? Are they not working for him? Does not their time and strength, so far as they are employed, belong to him? Shall they protest against his inquiry into and watchfulness over his own business? Does not the same principle apply far more cogently to God? Because He has made us, we are His. The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, all that it produces, all that has in the flight of years come out of it,—and

why? Because He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the flood. As the employer questions his servant, as the father questions his child, as an owner has a right to inquire about and to rule in the management of his own possessions, so may we say that God,—the free, the real author and owner of human life,—has a right to watch, investigate, judge, and deal with the creatures He has made.

You will say, perhaps, True, if we were mere inanimate things: but we are moral beings; and while God has, indeed, created us, we have, when once created, our rights and liberties no less truly than He has His rights and powers. You will say, perhaps, that while a father has the right to question and direct his child, this is only so long as the latter is a child; when he becomes of age he asserts his own independence. Why does not the same independence belong to man in his relation to his Father in the heavens?

But you must not press one side of the divine character so far as to obscure the rest. God is our Father, but He is also our Creator, and our King, and our Master. His paternity is not so much after our modern idea as like that of the old Roman theory. The Roman father owned his child as though it were a chattel till the day of his own death. He had even the power of life and death over it. He was absolute master and judge in his whole household. This is more like God's position. For while He has

all love and tenderness, which the Roman often lacked, He has all the authority which the Roman claimed. I admit, indeed, that our moral natures may give us some rights and liberties even as regards God. We may have the right to fair trial. We may have the right to just treatment. We may have the liberty, if we choose, of rebellion: but the right of rebellion we have not. God, I say, has made us; He owns us; and, therefore, He is our lawful Ruler and lawful Judge. Before Him we are bound to bow. Conscience and reason, as well as religion, uphold His august tribunal. As creatures, we must give our account to Him. He has the right to make inquiry as to what we are, to examine how we have lived, to deal out to us what we know that we deserve.

We maintain, therefore, the rightfulness of God's judgment because God is the Creator and Lord of the world. "God is judge Himself." We would repudiate many a judgment of man. If God were a mere unconscious force, it, too, would have no such right, even as it could not exercise it. But by all our conviction of a personal, free author of the world, may we be sure that the judgment which conscience leads us to expect, and which revelation so clearly teaches, is right and proper: and against such right, united with such power, how vain must be man's anger and rebellion! What are they like, but the dashing of waves against everlasting




rock, which only break themselves, and fall into the sea again ?

But more important to us than the rightfulness is the righteousness of this divine judgment. It may comfort us to know that the trial which we cannot escape is a lawful one ; but it will add to our comfort to know that it will be just and fair. And this is certified by our text again. "The heavens shall declare his righteousness : for God is judge Himself." He committed it to no angel, nor mere man ; for they would not be qualified for the work. Only God Himself can be a righteous judge of human lives.

And this because He, and He alone, is omniscient. Of course, we cannot comprehend omniscience, and, therefore, we fail to realize God's exact knowledge of all that exists or occurs. We can only make approaches to such a conception, and by the aid of analogies realize, at least, how incomprehensible omniscience is, and yet what some of its consequences are. We can only use figures which represent, though they do not picture, this unknown quantity.

Perhaps we may partly realize the meaning of omniscience by means of its equal mystery, omnipresence. God knows everything because God is always everywhere. He is as truly and as fully present at the farthest verge of creation as at its centre in the heavens. It is not that He can, with piercing eye, see all that happens at any distance, but that there is no



such thing as distance from Him. It is not that He is Lord of innumerable agents, who with lightning speed report events before His throne, but that the whole universe lies before Him as distinctly as the field of vision under the strongest microscope does to the student's eye. It is not that, like the mind in the body, He is in nervous, vital connection with the whole vast frame of creation, but that in every member thereof the divine mind is actually resident. Whatever lives and moves and has being does so in Him, in His immediate presence, because of His supporting power; and it costs my eye more effort to glance at yonder page than it costs the infinite One to observe at all times, every movement, of matter or of mind, that occurs in all the universe. There are forces of nature which seem to us almost omnipresent. It needs but about eight minutes for the light to flash over the ninety-three millions of miles which separate us from the sun. Yet light and electricity are but ministers of His that do His pleasure. They speed across space; while He is at the same moment in all space,—in sun, and stars, and world.

"The Lord our God is Lord of all;  
His station who can find?  
I hear him in the waterfall,  
I hear him in the wind.  
If in the gloom of night I shroud,  
His face I cannot fly;  
I see him in the evening cloud  
And in the morning sky."



aging side. His judgment is to be, we are told, according to the light men have had. Men's circumstances will determine their responsibility. The knowledge of truth they have possessed, the surroundings in which they have been reared, the character of the temptations to which they have been exposed, and the causes which give these their power,—such are some of the determining elements, we may suppose, of this judgment; and you can easily imagine how, on such principles, it will often reverse the judgments which men pass upon each other. Then, too, God's judgment will be as kind as is consistent with righteousness. Every earnest soul has the divine sympathy, and God watches and appreciates every effort to do right, even though it may seem to fail. "He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."

This is further certified by the revealed fact that Christ,—the God-man,—is to be our judge. He unites all that we have said of omniscience with all that we can desire of sympathy. He has Himself known human life. He has been tempted as we are: and, therefore, when Christ shall gather before His bar the nations of earth, the consciences of men will unite with the heavens in declaring His righteousness. Not only will God Himself be judge, but God in man will be judge; and what there may be of God in other men will approve and applaud His sentence. Yes, righteousness and judgment are the habitations of His

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throne. The sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre in His hand. Not only is it right that He should call us to account; but most fair, most impartial, most comprehensive, will the decision be. Every mouth will be stopped; no complaint will be possible. No wrong, not even the slightest, will be done. Not an element that may help to solve the problem will have been forgotten. God is the judge Himself, and that fact assures the perfect righteousness of His summing up of every human life.

It would seem clearly to follow from all this that the divine judgment is to be final. So it is commonly and instinctively conceived by men, both in and out of Christendom; and, from what we have said, it is evident why it must be final. There can be no reason for an appeal from God's decision. There is no court to which such an appeal could be taken. God is now the judge Himself, and, if so, we are at the end of things. The balances are being struck. The period of probation is over. The results have been attained, and thenceforward the consequences unalterably follow.

The question has been raised, it is true, as to the limits of man's probation. It has of late been frequently maintained that most people have not in this world a fair chance. Multitudes die in ignorance of the gospel. In Christendom itself multitudes live in such circumstances that the faith and morality of Chris-

tians cannot be expected of them. The difference between the advantages of some and the disadvantages of others, it is said, is so marked that it would be unreasonable to suppose probation to be limited to this life. Hence it is argued that another chance—or perhaps it would be best to say a fair chance—must be given in the next world. Not a few, indeed, would deny any limit to probation, and maintain that whenever men shall repent and turn to God, though it be in hell itself, He will, He must, receive them.

The view of Scripture truth which we have presented would, however, certainly refute these delusive hopes. It is as clear as day that if the Scriptures mean anything at all, they mean that probation has a definite, fixed limit. "He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained." God is very patient. He has put the day of decision a long way off, that by His forbearance He may lead men to repentance. But that appointed day will come. Then God will be judge Himself, and the majesty of that tribunal is such as to preclude any after it. It must be the final summing up. It is the Supreme Court. From it there can be no appeal. Not only are we clearly taught this general fact, but we are taught just as clearly the correlated fact that the probation of each man does end with this life. It is human life, here in the flesh, whose worth is to be passed upon. Man

shall give account to Him for the deeds done in the body. On these will turn the sentence.

How, then, you say, about the inequalities between men? How can all be said to have had here a fair chance, when one dies at fifteen and another at seventy; when one is reared in ignorance and another in the light of a Christian home? Surely, what has been said about the righteousness of God and His omniscience will remove such a difficulty! God will take into consideration every circumstance. Not seldom will those, I conceive, who seem to us to have had the fewest advantages, be better off than those who have had more. It would have been better for many men to have died in their boyhood, since they were nearer to the kingdom at twenty than ever after. "The publicans and harlots," said Jesus to the Pharisees, "enter the kingdom before you."

There is in all men some light. All hear the voice of conscience. It may be a misguided conscience, but yet it is enough to reveal the moral choice of the individual's life. It is not necessary that men should know the whole truth in order to ascertain their love of truth. It is not necessary that men should know perfect goodness in order to ascertain their wish for or against it. The flower and fruits of character alike lie in the germ; and He who, as we have seen, is able perfectly to estimate the worth of every life, will win the approbation of the universe in His estimate of the humblest

and obscurest not less than of the highest and best. "God is judge Himself," and therefore judgment is final. It could not be improved upon. No more wisdom, or knowledge, or goodness, can be obtained. Man is standing before His Maker; the allotted time of trial has been finished; infinite love and goodness will unite with infinite holiness and truth to exhibit perfect righteousness. "The books" may now be opened; as many as have sinned with law shall also perish with law; and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law. For this is "the day in which God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ," and "the heavens shall declare His righteousness, for He is judge Himself."

I know that, shrouded as we are by the material world, and busy as we are with present interests, it is hard to believe in this divine inspection of our lives; hard to credit that we shall ever appear before our God. But now and then flashes of faith, voices of conscience, revelations in prayer, make us aware of what we see not. The spirit in man proclaims a higher destiny than the grave. Christ speaks words that ought to end all doubt. Be, therefore, not deceived. Remember the sleepless eye. Remember the unseen presence. What may now appear to you terrible, will give comfort and joy, if once you love Him. Remember that we have a great High Priest. If any man sin, we have an Advocate. Give your case to Him; and when at

last you take your place before God, you will find yourself accepted and saved, because Christ pleads for you His blood; and for every effort you have made to serve Him, you will receive your reward. "God is judge Himself," and He has said that he who believes in Jesus shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death unto life. By all the peril which yawns before us, by all the hopes of immortality we possess, by all the words of Him who is true, I beseech you, in this your day of probation, to turn to Christ the Saviour. Then the day of judgment will be your day of coronation, and earth's probation will end for you in heaven's eternal life.













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JUL 13 1911

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